



# MYSTERY ON HAPPY BONES

## A Doc Savage Adventure by Kenneth Robeson

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### Chapter I. ONE UNUSUAL BOX

It was raining, so the messenger wore a raincoat. Like most raincoats, this one pretty much enveloped the wearer. The messenger did have a young face.

And a mustache. It was noticeable, because it was not much of a mustache. It looked like a couple of mouse tails, somewhat.

There was also a box which the messenger carried. A box wrapped with too much steel wire. That is, there was too much wire considering that it was a cardboard box.

The messenger walked into the most substantial skyscraper in midtown Manhattan, and said, "I have a package for Clark Savage, Junior."

"You mean Doc Savage," said the elevator starter.

"It says Clark Savage, Junior, on the tag. That's all I know about it."

"I'll take it," said the elevator starter.

"Is your name Clark Savage, Junior?"

"Of course not," said the starter. "Say, you're pretty dumb, aren't you?"

"Not," said the messenger, "dumb enough to hand this over to you when I got orders to have Clark

Savage personally sign for it.”

“Clark Savage is Doc Savage. Clark is his name. Say, kid, haven't you ever heard of Doc Savage?”

“Huh?”

“Say, you are *really* dumb, aren't you?”

The messenger kicked the elevator starter on the shin. The starter squalled and leaped into the air. He jumped around clutching his peeled shin.

“You're lucky I didn't decide to kick you in the eye,” said the messenger. “I may be dumb, but I kick high.”

The cardboard box was about twelve inches square and the cardboard was a strong and not expensive type. As for the wire, there was at least a hundred feet of that. The verdict of someone that knew a little about wire would have been that it was Imperial Standard Wire Gauge No. 15, diameter 1 and eight tenths millimeters, of steel.

The messenger carried the box up to an ordinary fifth-floor office, on instructions from an elevator operator.

The office was occupied by two gentlemen and a pig and a chimpanzee.

The messenger looked at the two men and the menagerie, sighed, and said, “I bet I have to do some more kicking.”

ONE of the men must have been the fellow they wrote the “Mister Five by Five” song about. He was also as hairy as a goat and as ugly as a clock-stopper.

“I'm Monk Mayfair,” he said.

The other man was notable for his clothes, for an innocent-looking black cane which was always with him, and for his large, mobile mouth, the mouth of a talker.

“I'm Ham Brooks,” he said.

“I might be Bo Peep, but I ain't,” said the messenger. “What kind of a clown's nest is this? I got a package for Doc Savage. I ask where to find him, and I get sass from the elevator starter downstairs. Then I get sent up here and I see I am in for more sass.”

Monk Mayfair and Ham Brooks inspected the messenger, and Ham ventured an opinion. “A case of nondidactic.”

“What,” asked the messenger, “does that mean I am?”

“Dumb,” Ham said.

“Ah,” said the messenger.

Monk Mayfair hooked a pair of hairy thumbs in the armholes of an unpressed vest and announced, “You're in the right place, kid.”

“The right place for what?”

“To deliver a package to Doc Savage.”

The messenger eyed them. “Huh-uh! Neither of you two mistakes is Doc Savage.”

“This,” explained Monk patiently, “is a way-station on the route to Doc Savage. Things go through us to get to Doc. We're the quarantine and inspection station.

“A quarantine and inspection station,” said the messenger, “is where they stop your car and look on your fruit for bugs.”

“That's the idea.”

“I'm a bug, huh?”

“Let's not complicate it,” Monk said. “What have you got there?”

“A package.”

“Where did you get it?”

“The office gave it to me to deliver. I work for an outfit that delivers stuff.”

“All right,” Monk said. “Now I'll show you how we function. What is your name and your employer?”

“Neddie Wooster,” said the messenger, “and the outfit is the Winged Foot Delivery Service, coast-to-coast, with offices in all the principal cities.”

Monk picked up a telephone directory, found a number, dialed it, got the Winged Foot concern, and asked if they had a messenger named Neddie Wooster. Monk had to explain who he was. He said he was Lieutenant Colonel Andrew Blodgett Mayfair, affiliated with the Doc Savage organization. He made it sound impressive. Eventually, he got his information. He hung up.

“You see how it works?” he asked the messenger. “Winged Foot says Neddie Wooster is O. K. Now if you hadn't been O. K., we would have had you.”

The messenger was not impressed.

“What is this?” asked the messenger. “A nest of half-wits?”

“A nest of precaution-takers,” Monk said.

“We want to die of old age,” Ham Brooks said.

“We want Doc to die of old age,” Monk corrected. “You see, Neddie Wooster, Doc Savage is an unusual fellow and everybody on this earth is not his friend. In fact, there are people who shake and turn white all over at the idea of Doc. Now and then some such try to get rid of Doc, so they can live a more peaceful, and more crooked, life. Get it?”

“I see,” said the messenger. “You're a pair of stooges.”

“O. K., O. K.” Monk was disgusted. “Hand me that package. We're wasting time trying to educate you.”

“I hand this package to Doc Savage,” said the messenger. “Anybody else gets it over my dead body.”

“Why act like that?”

“It's a motto of the Winged Foot Delivery Service, coast-to—”

“Never mind,” Monk interrupted hastily. “You just put the package on this desk here. Nobody will touch it.”

The messenger stared at the desk. “O. K. But I can see you guys are wiggly between the ears.”

The package went on the desk.

THE desk was a dark wood affair of more than normal size with a black, composition top.

The trick to the desk was the composition top, made of the same kind of stuff from which is fashioned the film-holders which surgeons use in their X-ray machines. The material was transparent to X rays.

Under the desk, in the knee-hole, so that it could be observed only from the back, where Monk and Ham sat, there was a fluoroscope for viewing the object to be X-rayed, the type of fluoroscope used by X-ray workers in the days before they discovered that a photographic film was a much better way to do it. An arrangement of mirrors permitted a good view of the fluoroscope without the observers doing anything suspicious while observing.

The X-ray projector was located in the ceiling, and camouflaged so that it was not noticeable.

When the package was on the desk, Monk turned on the X ray by tramping on a control button hidden under the carpet.

They took a good look at the X-rayed contents of the package.

“Ahem,” Monk said to the messenger. “We . . . ah . . . had better tell Doc Savage you are here with a package, since you are so contrary. Come on, Ham.”

“Me?” Ham said. “I had better stay here and watch that our little messenger here doesn't carry off the furniture or the radiators.”

“I resent that,” the messenger said.

“Of course you do,” Monk said. “Ham, you were born a gentleman, but you sure have slipped. Come with me and help find Doc.”

Ham realized that Monk had something on his mind, and said, “Sure, sure.”

Monk and Ham retired to the adjoining room. They closed the door.

“There ain't nothing in the package,” Monk said.

Ham nodded. “Empty box.”

“Looks suspicious.”

“On the other hand,” said Ham, “there might be poison gas in the box. I'll bet that's what it is.”

“I thought of that,” Monk said.

“I’ll bet you did!” Ham sneered. He scratched his head. “What are we going to do about it?”

Monk said, “I would suggest a course of treatments aimed at getting the truth out of this messenger.”

“Have you got an idea, you missing link?”

Monk had an idea. He explained it. Ham was moved to admiration, although he was reluctant to admire anything that Monk conceived or did, under ordinary conditions.

HAM went back into the room where the messenger was waiting and said, “We are having a little difficulty. My friend Monk has gone hunting, and he can do as well as both of us, so I thought I’d keep you company.”

The messenger looked young, owlish and bored.

“That Monk,” said the messenger, “is a funny-looking one.”

“He sure is,” Ham agreed heartily. “And he is as silly as he looks.”

“Gosh!”

“Terrible, isn’t it?”

The messenger gazed around the office absently, and finally fell to examining the two animals, the pig and the chimpanzee, showing more interest. “What are those?”

“A chimpanzee and a pig.”

“What are they doing here?” asked the messenger. “And I know a chimpanzee and a pig when I see them.”

“Pets.”

“Whose?”

“The chimp is mine,” Ham explained. “And the pig belongs to that freak of nature, Monk.” Ham eyed the pig sourly. “Some day I am going to have him served up as breakfast bacon.”

The messenger eyed the pig. The animal had legs like a rabbit, a snout built for exploring into deep holes, and a pair of ears of such size that it looked as if he had been equipped to become a glider in emergencies. “Got a name?”

“Habeas Corpus,” Ham explained, glaring at the pig.

“Come here, Habeas,” said the messenger. “Nice pig.” Habeas ignored the messenger. “Come here, before I kick your ribs in,” the messenger said.

Habeas Corpus, the pig, got up and stalked over to the messenger.

Ham’s eyes popped. “By Jove!” he blurted. “That’s unexpected. Habeas Corpus usually never pays any attention to anybody except Monk and pretty girls.”

“Pretty girls?” the messenger said.

“He's like Monk that way.”

“Go away, Habeas,” the messenger said.

Ham waved an arm. “Now you take my chimp,” he said. “There is an animal equipped with brains. Smartest thing you ever saw. Sometimes I think he is not an animal, but a hitherto unknown type of aboriginal mankind.”

“He looks somewhat like Monk.”

“Don't insult Chemistry,” Ham said.

The telephone rang. Ham picked up the instrument, said, “Doc Savage associate, Ham Brooks, speaking,” and listened. Ham straightened. He slammed his feet down on the floor. “You sure?” he demanded. “That's right, eh? . . . Well, well, well!” He cracked the telephone back on its cradle.

Ham came erect. He pointed a finger at the messenger. He gave off indignation as if it were sparks.

“You crook!” Ham yelled.

THE messenger jumped. “What? What's that?”

“You crook!” Ham pointed at the telephone. “I just got it over the telephone. You crook, you!”

“I don't understand—”

Ham stabbed at the package. “Trying to pull a thing like this!” he bellowed.

He sprang over the desk, toward the messenger.

“I'll fix you!” he shouted.

The door flew open violently, and a large, short, white-haired gentleman in a green raincoat and green felt hat came in carrying a revolver which was so large and impressive that nothing else was important, suddenly.

The newcomer had a rather thin, quavering voice. He told Ham, “Hold everything! Or would you like to fall dead from bullet holes?”

Ham stopped. “Who the heck are you?” he blurted.

“Get your hands up!” The elderly apparition waved the enormous gun.

Ham put both arms stiffly above his head.

“Now,” said the gun-wielder, “you stand there.” He beckoned at the messenger. “Come on, kid.”

The messenger gulped. “But—”

“Come on, come on!” yelled the white-haired raider. “The boss sent me, you idiot. He found out something had gone wrong.”

The messenger, without more objections, but acting very confused, backed out of the door.

The old gentleman told Ham loudly, "You know what happens to guys who follow guys with guns." Then he ran out into the hall and grabbed the messenger's arm. "Come on, kid," he said.

They got down to the street without any more excitement. The messenger still seemed confused. They climbed into a roadster and got going up the street.

There was a protracted silence.

"The boss sent me," repeated the white-haired gentleman.

"What boss?"

"Don't give me that, kid. Don't play simple with me. I'm in this, too, you know."

"In what?" asked the messenger.

The other snorted violently.

There was more silent driving. The old gentleman seemed to become suspicious. He bawled at the messenger. "Say, you act awful dumb, kid," he growled. "Maybe I made a mistake. Maybe you ain't the guy I was supposed to rescue."

"The rescue wasn't my idea," said the messenger.

"On second thought," growled the white-haired fellow, "you had better tell me enough to make me sure."

"Make you sure of what?"

"That you're the right one."

"What right one?"

"Nuts," said the white-haired rescuer. "I wish I'd let them have you. Look, the boss said to go with you to the place."

"The place?"

"Sure. You know where that is?"

The messenger gave it some thought, then said, "Sure. You turn right at the next corner. Two blocks. The Summerview Hotel."

THE Summerview was a pleasant hostelry out of the loud and noisy midtown section. It did not have a bar, but did have a dining room, which looked good. The lobby was old-fashioned and quiet.

The messenger and the white-haired gentleman entered and took an elevator to the sixth floor, where there was a long corridor with several turnings.

The messenger stopped the old fellow, and said, "You wait here."

"Hey, I'm supposed to stay right with you."

"I don't doubt it. But you wait here, see. I want to see if the coast is clear."

“Uh—well,” said the white-haired man,

He stood there, and watched the messenger go on down the hall.

The messenger walked to Room 632, pulled out a key, and unlocked the door. A quick glance down the hall showed that the old gentleman was for the moment looking in the other direction.

The messenger casually picked up a brass urn containing sand, an arrangement for snuffing out cigarettes and found in the halls of most hotels, and carried it into the room.

The room was large and pleasant, a place for rest. But there was nothing casual or restful about the messenger's activity.

The messenger hastily stripped off the messenger uniform. Next, a case was opened, and the liquid from a bottle was smeared on the messenger's upper lip. Other material, a theatrical removal cream, went on the messenger's face. A towel wiped off the accumulation.

The result was a very efficient-looking young woman.

The closet held an assortment of frocks. There was nothing cheap about them. And nothing dull, it developed. She put on make-up.

Examining the result in a mirror, she was satisfied.

She selected a pair of stockings. “My last silk stockings,” she said regretfully.

She filled a stocking with sand from the hall urn, and pulled the second stocking over the first one for strength. She tried the result by socking it into her hand. She poured out some sand, and socked her hand again. “Perfect,” she said.

She tucked the stocking-sand gadget in a purse, tucked the purse under her arm, and sauntered out into the hall. She walked to the white-haired gentleman.

The white-haired gentleman looked at her with great appreciation. He said something to himself that looked to be, from the movement of his lips, “M-m-m-m-m!”

It was quite apparent that he did not recognize her as the young man messenger.

The young woman gave him a good, big, but refined, eye-roll.

“Why, Mr. Jones,” she said. “You are Mr. Jones, aren't you? The gentleman who backs shows.”

The white-haired gentleman practically baked to a crisp under her smile.

“I back shows,” he said, truthfully, “occasionally.”

“Oh, Mr. Jones, I'm *so* glad to run into you this way,” said the young woman. Her tone would have made an iceberg turn to steam.

Then she dropped her gloves. “Oh!” she said.

The white-haired gentleman doubled over hastily to pick up the gloves.

The young woman's tone changed.

“You're a sap for anything in skirts, just as I heard,” she said. And added, “Monk Mayfair!”

“Huh?” Monk blurted, just before she hit him over the head with the stocking-sandbag.

## Chapter II. THE WIRE

MONK MAYFAIR had been knocked senseless a number of times as the natural result of his rather hectic career as a Doc Savage associate, and it was a peculiarity of his intervals of enforced unconsciousness that he always dreamed about a green waterfall. It was always the same waterfall, and it was invariably the same identical waterfall, always the same shade of green, a very dark shade—darker, even, than grass. For a number of years, it had been the same waterfall, and it was peculiar because one of the things that interested Monk least in his conscious moments was waterfalls. It was beginning to bother Monk.

Monk came out of the waterfall, and found Ham Brooks staring at him, which made Monk wish he could go back to the waterfall again. He was embarrassed.

“Well?” said Ham disgustedly. “What were you doing taking a nap?”

“I was hit over the head!” Monk said indignantly.

“Who by?”

“Where were you?” Monk snapped, trying to change the subject. “Why weren't you around to help me? I thought you were going to follow close behind, in case I needed a hand.”

This subdued Ham. He explained, “I was waiting downstairs. I didn't want to come right up, for fear I would spoil your plan. What did you learn?”

“Nothing,” said Monk disgustedly.

“Nothing? I don't believe it. Say, with a smart scheme like that, you were bound to learn something. The messenger would think you were one of the gang after you pulled the rescue, and would tell you everything. Didn't it work?”

Monk considered what he should say. “It didn't work,” he confessed.

“Why?”

“Come on,” Monk said sourly. “That messenger went into Room 623. Let's take a look.”

They found the hotel room locked. Ham was a lawyer by trade, and the door baffled him. Monk, however, was a chemist, and he had included a little lock-picking on the side. He went to work on the lock, which was not complicated, and got it open by ruining the snap-fastener on the band of his wrist watch.

“There's the messenger's uniform!” Ham yelled, the moment they were in the room.

The feminine garments in the closet were naturally the next discovery.

Ham stared at Monk. “Oh, oh!” he said. “The messenger was a girl.”

Monk made no comment.

“Was she pretty?” Ham asked.

“How would I know?” Monk muttered.

“Of course she was pretty,” Ham decided. “She had to be, to get close enough to pop you over the head.”

Monk registered misery. “Do we have to tell the fellows about this?” he mumbled.

Ham was very cheerful.

“You won't need to tell them,” he said. “I'll do it, and gladly!”

THEY made a competent search of the young woman's room. What they found did not give much satisfaction. She obviously had money to spend on clothes, and had good taste.

Monk removed his old-man makeup in the bathroom at the gloomy conclusion of the fruitless search.

Ham said, “That was sure a good disguise. And you did some fine acting. I don't see how she caught on.”

“I had a theatrical make-up expert put it on,” Monk said sourly. “He's in the same building with Doc's offices. I think I'll go in there and pull an ear off him. Of course, she saw through the make-up!”

They went downstairs, and after some arguing, found that the young woman had registered with the name of T. Hannah, Washington, D. C. That was all.

They arranged to be called immediately if the young woman should reappear at the hotel.

“Now,” Monk said, “we get the home address of that messenger whose name she used, Neddie Wooster.”

Neddie Wooster lived in the Bronx, and he was a scrawny-looking young man, obviously a 4F in the draft. He was home reading a newspaper. Fortunately, they found that he scared easily. And when he was scared, he talked very rapidly.

Ten dollars was the answer.

The ten dollars had been given Neddie Wooster by the young woman for the rental of his uniform and the privilege of using it for what she had explained was a “masquerade party.” Neddie Wooster had only one uniform, so he had been forced to stay at home, which he hadn't minded until Monk and Ham turned up. As scared as Neddie Wooster was after Monk and Ham got through with him, his story could not have been anything but the truth.

“Dead end,” Monk said. “That's a foxy girl.”

“Well, anyway, we've done enough that now we can face Doc Savage without blushing,” Ham said. “That is—I can.” He grinned at Monk. “I wouldn't know about you!”

Monk asked gloomily, “You going to tell them I got into trouble because of a pretty girl again?”

“Am I?” Ham chortled. “Brother!”

Monk became belligerent and tried threatening Ham. “You keep your blat shut!” Monk yelled. “Or I'll hit you over the head so hard you'll be using your shoe eyelets for portholes.”

Ham wasn't impressed.

DOC SAVAGE occupied the eighty-sixth floor of the building in which Monk and Ham operated the preliminary inspection office on the fifth floor.

The eighty-sixth floor was devoted mostly to laboratory and library, but there was a small reception room in which the furnishings consisted of some upholstered chairs, an unusual inlaid table, and an enormous safe.

Monk and Ham told their story. Monk tried to leave out the part about his own misfortune, but Ham put that in, trying not to howl with mirth.

Doc Savage listened without comment and without visible show of emotion.

Doc Savage looked almost as unusual as his reputation, a characteristic which few famous people have. He was a giant of a man, so symmetrically proportioned that his true size was not evident until one stood close to him, or saw him near some object to which his giant stature could be compared.

Tropical suns had turned his skin a deep bronze, and his hair was a shade of bronze only slightly darker. His features were regular, handsome, but not fine-featured. His eyes were dominant, strange, like pools of flake gold always stirred by tiny winds.

The strength of the man, however, came from the things he did and said—or the way he did and said things, rather than from his unusual size and appearance. There was corded strength in his movements, and a quality of controlled power in his voice. He had these things to a great degree, and in that respect he did resemble men who have a great reputation, since greatness is probably more personality and character than any superhuman physical strength or wizardlike collection of knowledge.

Ham placed the wire-bound box on the table.

“There it is,” he finished. “We X-rayed it. It shows empty under the X ray.”

“We think,” said Monk, “that it must be full of poison gas.”

“What gave you the idea?” Doc asked quietly.

“What else could be in it?” Monk said.

DOC SAVAGE studied the box for a while. It was one of his peculiarities, one of the evidences of his unusual early life, that he rarely showed emotion.

There were few other evidences of his strange youth, which in itself was remarkable, because the upbringing should have produced a human freak.

Doc Savage had been placed in the hands of scientists in babyhood, under the direction and financial support of his father; and from then on, for many years, he had been trained for the specific job of following the strange and unusual career of righting wrongs and punishing evildoers in the out-of-the-way corners of the earth. He followed that career now.

The training had left him somewhat different from other men in personality, and certainly a great deal different in abilities. His physical strength was phenomenal. His mental equipment was fantastic.

He finished inspecting the box, said, "Will you get a small pocket compass, Monk?"

Monk hurried into the laboratory, came back with a compass of the type Boy Scouts carry.

"You notice," Doc said, "the wire. It is nowhere tied in a knot or twisted together."

He passed the compass close to the wire.

The compass needle was slightly attracted in many places.

"I don't get it," Monk said. Then Monk's eyes got wide. "Blazes! Wait a minute! A recorder wire!"

Like any mystery, it was simple when understood. Doc Savage had used the method of recording conversation on wire for a long time. It was more efficient than using wax records for recording, particularly when recordings over long periods of time were necessary.

Ham dashed away and came back with the device which took the magnetic impulses off the wire and transferred them into sound.

(Magnetic recording on steel wire has been practical for a long time, but only recently have commercial models of such a device been prepared. This is probably the future form of voice recording and will displace wax dictaphone and wax phonograph methods. For steel wire cannot be shattered, and it can be used over and over again when previous messages are "erased" by demagnetizing. This device incidentally, is one of the scientific gadgets introduced and used by Doc Savage long before such apparatus was marketed or even patented.)

The wire had been recorded on a machine of different operating speed from their own. As a result, the voice was a ducklike squawking and gabbling at first. But they got the speed right.

The recorded voice became coherent. It was a deep, educated, pleasant voice, with the harsh burr in it of a man who had used the voice, and loudly, in shouting orders. It said:

*"Mr. Savage, this is Major Sam Lowell, United States army, War Department Annex, Washington, D. C. I am taking this rather unusual method of getting a message to you because unusual measures seem necessary.*

*"I have reason to believe any normal method of communicating with you which I might take would result in this information falling into the wrong hands, with the consequence of danger to both of us.*

*"I could use a great many words explaining this thing. All the words would add up to little, however. So I am just going to say one thing:*

*"I need your help.*

*"I am confronted with an inexplicable mystery, and I have the feeling that the thing is going to grow into, a matter of great importance. I have asked my superior officers who to consult, and they recommend you. They say you have offered your services in connection with unusual matters such as this. I assure you it is an unusual matter, and I want your help.*

*"Will you arrange to meet me Wednesday night, 10 p.m., the houseboat named 'Four Seasons,' foot of K Street.*

*"The operative who will deliver this is a girl, in case you have not so discovered, and a very*

*capable operative in my department.*

*“This is very important, so I will expect you—and thanks.”*

That was all of the message, and Doc Savage switched off the reproducing apparatus.

Monk muttered, “She was capable, all right. But I didn’t dream she was an army intelligence agent.”

“That doesn’t tell us much, Doc,” Ham said.

“As much, probably,” Doc suggested, “as could be trusted to a communication. This is war time, you know. And mistakes too often mean human lives.”

“Army intelligence operative, eh?” Monk said, sounding pleased. “You know, I had the feeling that girl was all right all along.”

“All you had,” Ham said unkindly, “was your usual feelings when you see a pretty girl.”

NORMALLY, there were five associates in Doc Savage’s group. There was a sixth, a young woman, Patricia Savage, who was Doc’s cousin, who managed to nose into their troubles occasionally. Monk and Ham were two of the group.

The other three members were William Harper—Johnny—Littlejohn; Colonel John—Renny—Renwick; and Major Thomas J.—Long Tom—Roberts. Johnny was an archaeologist and geologist, Renny was an engineer, and Long Tom was the electrical expert of the organization.

Long Tom was in Russia at the moment, serving as consulting expert with the Russian army.

Doc Savage began trying to get Renny and Johnny on the telephone.

“Patricia is in California, setting up the physical-conditioning system for a new WAAC camp,” Ham said. “We can sit back and breathe easy, knowing she won’t barge into this.”

Monk was eyeing the record-wire.

“Doc,” he said, “do you know a Major Lowell?”

“No,” Doc said.

“I don’t either,” Monk remarked. “Ham, do you?”

Ham said he didn’t, and got Renny and Johnny on the telephone. “You want to talk to them, Doc?”

Taking the phone, Doc asked, “What are you two doing now?”

“Serving as ornaments.” Renny Renwick had a big voice, the voice of something very large in a very cavernous hole.

“Then,” Doc said, “you would not mind joining us to look into something that might be interesting?”

“It would sure be a relief,” Renny declared.

“You and Johnny arrange to be in Washington as soon as possible,” Doc said. “Meet us at the usual hotel.”

“Holy cow! Sure.”

Doc Savage hung up the telephone. He turned his attention back to the box around which the voice-record wire had been wrapped. They had opened the box as a matter of course, and found it empty. Or Monk and Ham had considered it empty.

“If we get a chance to ask questions about this,” Doc said, “we might ask questions about a green parrot and its nest.”

Monk stared. “Green parrot and its nest! What the blazes!”

Doc indicated two very small feathers he had found in the box, and some small bits of litter. He pointed out what the other two had overlooked—that the feathers were breast feathers off a parrot, a green one, and that the litter was part of a nest, perhaps. At any rate, the twigs were tropical in origin, bits of *lignum vitae* and other growth typical to the tropics. South America and the Caribbean Islands.

“Do not overlook the parrot,” Doc said.

### **Chapter III. THE WASHINGTON TRICK**

THEY sat down at the airport in Washington, the airport across the river used by the commercial planes, by midafternoon. The airline had a cab waiting, and they moved fast, because it was easier to do what they wanted to do before offices closed for the day.

Monk and Ham had received instructions on the plane, and they scattered to follow them. Their job was to check up and be sure there was a Major Lowell, and find out what they could about him.

They took along the wire-record, and a transcribing apparatus, to check Major Lowell's voice.

Doc Savage himself looked into the matter of the woman operative, T. Hannah.

There was some doubt in his mind whether her name *was* T. Hannah, which was the name under which she had registered at the hotel in New York City.

However, there was a woman operative named T. Hannah. She was not connected with the war department directly, or any of the other armed services. T. Hannah, it seemed, was a private detective agency operator.

Doc telephoned the T. Hannah agency.

“Miss Hannah,” he was told, “is not available today. She is out of the city on business.”

“In New York City?” Doc asked.

“I am sorry. You will understand that much of our business is confidential.”

“This is Doc Savage,” Doc explained.

There was some deliberation at the other end of the wire. “In that case,” said the voice at the agency—it was a man speaking—“there is probably no harm in telling you that Miss Hannah went to New York to deliver a package to you.”

“Does she have a green parrot?”

“Why, no.”

“Can you give me any information concerning the package?”

“I am sorry. I cannot. As I understand, a client of Miss Hannah's wished the package to be delivered to you, and the circumstances were such that it was a somewhat dangerous job, demanding the personal attention of Miss Hannah. That is all I know about it.”

“Will you describe Miss Hannah?” Doc suggested.

The description matched fully with that of the young woman who had given Monk a sandbagging in the corridor of the New York hotel.

Doc next checked with the Washington agency which handled private detective permits.

Miss Theodora Hannah had been a private detective in Washington for four years and three months.

The T. Hannah angle of the mystery was checking out fine.

Monk and Ham came in and reported.

Monk said, “There is a Major Lowell. Connected with the procurement division of the Army and Navy Emergency Necessity Office.”

Doc Savage nodded.

“That office,” he said, “is one that was set up recently, largely for the purpose of getting badly needed things in a hurry. That right?”

Monk nodded. “That's the idea. They jumped in recently and bought a bunch of cargo ships from an Argentine owner, ships nobody else had been able to get. They saw that arms and equipment were furnished in a hurry to some Eskimos in northern Alaska. They do everything. They're trouble-shooters. Major Lowell is head of the office.”

“Get any information about a green parrot?”

“Heck, no! They thought I was crazy.”

“What about other information?”

Monk grinned. “They weren't putting out any—at first. And then, after I proved who I was, I found out only one thing. Major Lowell does want to see you.”

Ham said, “Doc, I played the record of Major Lowell's voice on that wire to a stenographer in his office who knows his voice well. I played part of it, that is, a part that didn't tell anything. She said it was Lowell's voice, all right.”

It was all checking out fine.

“THE meeting with Major Lowell,” Doc Savage said, “is to take place tonight at 10 o'clock on a boat named *Four Seasons* at the foot of K Street.”

“We'd better go along, just in case,” Monk suggested.

Doc Savage shook his head.

“On the contrary,” he said, “here is what you will do. I want you to start making a big hullabaloo about finding a green parrot and its nest.”

“Hullabaloo?” Monk said. “Just what kind?”

“Get hold of the newspapers and put advertisements in the early editions,” Doc said. “Get hold of the radio-broadcasting stations and have short emergency announcements inserted at the end of programs. The radio stations will be suspicious, but you can identify yourselves and explain that it is important.”

“We just advertise for a green parrot and its nest?”

“That is right. And give an address to which replies are to be made.”

“Any particular address?”

“One you can watch,” Doc said. “You fellows can manage that nicely, I am sure.”

Ham nodded. “I see,” he said. “The idea is to cast out some bait in the shape of advertisements, and see what turns up in the way of an unusual interest in a parrot and its nest.”

“That,” Doc said, “is the plan.”

Monk scratched his head. “Doc, you make it look a little as if this thing wasn't on the up-and-up, as much as it seems to be.”

“Precautions,” Doc said, “never got anyone into trouble.”

TEN O'CLOCK that night proved to be a dark hour. It was particularly dark on that part of the water front not far from the foot of K Street.

Doc Savage arrived afoot and stood for some time, silent in the darkness, using his eyes and ears and nostrils. These senses had been remarkably developed by the unusual scientific training to which he had been submitted for years. They were overdeveloped, in fact, until they were animallike; and this always made Doc a little sensitive about showing that he possessed such abilities. When he was a kid, he had not thought much about them, except to be proud of them and appreciate their value. But now he was more mature, and sometimes uncomfortable. Sometimes he felt a little like an animal.

There was nothing alarming, and he located the boat, the *Four Seasons*. The craft certainly was not fancy. It was a “bug-eye” with the mast knocked out and the cabin structure, and a houselike superstructure substituted.

Bug-eye's are the traditional Chesapeake Bay oyster boats. Originally built by drifting three or five logs together with Swedish iron that, when it rusted, became solidly a part of the wood, they drew very little water. That was necessary, because the Chesapeake was shoal. Their slanting masts and overhanging, clipper-style bows made them the most rakish-looking boats to be found anywhere. But there was nothing rakish about this one. It looked deformed.

There was no light. Not a blade of light visible anywhere. The boat was tied to a dock with springlines, and there was no gangplank. To get aboard, you jumped.

It was still. From the city, there came the usual traffic sounds of Washington at this time of night. A large

plane was moaning purposefully across the sky.

Doc went aboard the boat lightly, got down into the shadows. There was no sound.

He moved aft. The deck was very narrow, hardly a deck at all. The exterior of the boat was old, and needed paint.

He heard nothing and saw nothing.

From a pocket, he took a small metal object, somewhat the shape of a watch, but thicker, and not much larger. The thing had a stemlike knob. Doc adjusted the stem for a while.

When he had the gadget adjusted satisfactorily, he placed it on top of the cabin, on a skylight.

He went silently to the dock side of the boat.

He put his feet down solidly on the deck, making sound now. He walked boldly to the deckhouse door. It was closed. He rapped it with his knuckles.

“Major Lowell!” he said. “This is Savage.”

A voice, a whisper, addressed him from inside.

“Not so loud,” it said. “But I’m glad you came. Just a moment.”

A key rattled in the deckhouse door. The door opened.

“Come inside,” the whisper invited.

Doc went inside.

Glare from a flashlight flooded him. In the back light, straining his eyes, he recognized the girl, Hannah.

She spoke in a voice that was not at all humorous.

“I’ve got two impulses,” she said. “One is to shoot you and the other is to give you a chance to explain things. If I was you, I wouldn’t jump around too much.”

There was no one else in the cabin.

DOC SAVAGE looked at her. It was the first time he had seen Hannah. But it was Hannah, all right, the way Monk had described her. She had a deep voice for a girl, not a freakish voice, but nevertheless a deep one. She had spoken in a whisper, of course, to hide the fact that she wasn’t a man. It was almost impossible to tell a woman’s whisper from a man’s whisper under such circumstances.

She was obviously a young woman of ability.

She tossed a small rope to Doc Savage. She was holding the rope ready, obviously having planned what she was going to do.

“Take hold of the end of the rope with each hand,” she said. “Wrap several turns around each hand, until there is about a foot of rope between your hands, then hold your hands above your head.”

Her revolver was large and blue and efficient.

Doc obeyed instructions.

Hannah said, "That's fine. I'm surprised this gag worked, really I am."

"You took a great deal of pains with it," Doc said.

She showed no signs of being flattered. "But with the reputation you've got, you shouldn't have been sucked in. You are supposed to be something special."

Doc let that go without comment.

She said, "Didn't you even try to find out if the government has an operative named T. Hannah?"

"The government does not have one. But there is a private detective named T. Hannah."

"So you did check," she said. She looked pleased. "And it fooled you. It took you in. What you found out made you think I was genuine."

Doc said, "The really convincing part was that you had been a private detective for four years here in Washington."

"I was never a private detective here in my life," she said.

"How did you manage it?"

"That T. Hannah is another girl."

"You are not T. Hannah?"

"My name is Hannah. Not T. Hannah. T. Hannah is my sister. My disapproving sister. Or half-sister, rather."

"She helped you?"

Hannah nodded. "Reluctantly. When I explained that I was being innocently involved in something."

"Innocently involved," Doc said, and made his voice skeptical.

Hannah showed a flash of anger. "I am not lying to you. You're rigging up something on me."

Doc Savage frowned. "I am?"

"You and Major Lowell," she said grimly.

"I do not know Major Lowell," Doc said.

She stared at him angrily. "You needn't lie to me. I haven't been watching every move Major Lowell and the others made for a week for nothing."

Doc Savage did not answer immediately. His manner was quiet. Finally, he said, "I take it you think I and Major Lowell are the organizers of some kind of a scheme against you?"

"That's right."

"Where is Major Lowell?"

“At home, I suppose.” She frowned at Doc. “If you’re wondering how come he isn’t here, or thinking he will show up, give up the idea. He won’t be. That wire-recording was a fake.”

“But,” said Doc, “it was Major Lowell’s voice.”

“With a good actor and enough money,” she said, “you can get almost any voice duplicated.”

“In other words—”

“I intercepted the original message,” she said, “and substituted one of my own. The machines for magnetically recording voices on wire are not so scarce now, you know.”

Doc asked, “You used the original box?”

“Of course. The original wire, too.”

“There was not,” Doc asked, “a green parrot and its nest in the box in the beginning?”

The effect of the parrot on the girl was noticeable. She stared fixedly at the bronze man over her gun. “Parrot,” she said. “Parrot and nest?”

“That is right. What—”

“I suppose,” she snapped, “that you will next try to tell me you do not know a thing about what is going on.”

Doc admitted, “That was my general intention when I got around to it.”

“You talking parrot!” she said angrily. “And you don’t know anything! A fine lie!”

The little gas grenade which Doc Savage had put on the skylight before he made his presence known finally got around to exploding.

## **Chapter IV. MAJOR TROUBLE**

THE blast was loud. The grenade was one of a new type, its function being to scatter an anaesthetic gas suddenly over a considerable area. Such abrupt dispersion required considerable explosive force.

Wood and splinters and a cloud of glass sprayed the boat cabin. Doc had maneuvered both himself and the girl into a spot where they would not be cut, prior to the blast.

Hannah neither screamed, fainted nor ran. She gave quite a jump of surprise, though. No one could have helped doing that.

Doc went forward while the glass was still flying and the cabin was still red with the grenade flash.

He got hold of Hannah’s gun, then had a little trouble possessing it. The young woman was strong.

She was more than strong, too. First, as they struggled for the gun, she pushed the little gadget which let the cylinder flop out. It hinged out. The cartridges rolled across the floor, jarred out of the gun by the struggle.

Hannah stopped trying to get the gun then. She locked both hands in Doc’s hair and gave his head a pull and a twist. She knew muscles and nerve co-ordination. He felt as if he had been beheaded for a

moment.

He reached to free her hands from his hair. She got one of his fingers, and did things to it. Never in his life had he felt quite as much pain from one spot as she made come from the finger. He got her loose from the finger.

He finally got her against a wall and helpless, but he was not especially proud of himself.

“You show just a little more efficiency,” he said grimly, “and I’ll have to treat you like a man, and plant one on your jaw.”

“Try it!” she invited irately. “Just try it!”

They stared at each other, each trying to browbeat the other.

Then her eyes closed slowly, her knees buckled, arms loosened, and she would have fallen. Doc held her up. To all appearances, she had gone suddenly to sleep.

It was the gas, the anaesthetic gas which had been in the grenade. The skylight glass had kept the stuff from scattering over the cabin as it normally would have, and it had filled the place a little tardily. Not very tardily, at that. Not more than thirty seconds after the blast. It had seemed a longer fight than thirty seconds.

Doc was holding his breath. Except for that once, when he had spoken to her, he had been holding his breath. The gas had to be inhaled to be effective, so that if you held your breath you would escape it.

In not much more than a minute, the stuff would mix with the air and neutralize itself. After that, it was safe, to breathe.

Doc lowered her to the cabin floor and began a search of the boat interior.

HE used a flashlight and searched rapidly. There was plenty of evidence that the boat had been here for some time, probably tied up here for the winter. The motor, not a bad motor, was coated with grease, and there was no starting battery. Standing rigging was greased, and running rigging had been made up in coils and hung in the fo’c’s’le. The shipmate stove was greased.

To the main hatch, where he had not noticed it before, there was a tacked notice:

THIS BOAT FOR SALE

ABNEY & GALE, YACHT BROKERS

The boat, then, might belong to anyone. Hannah probably had just taken it over for the night’s work.

This type of anaesthetic gas produced an effect that did not last much longer than fifteen minutes. Doc made himself comfortable, after going through Hannah’s purse, and finding nothing that told him anything.

The young woman revived eventually. She seemed surprised that Doc was alone.

“Nobody with you?” she said. “Who threw that bomb?”

“It was a time gas grenade,” Doc explained. “I simply set the time mechanism for five minutes, put it on the skylight, then came inside.”

She pondered that. "Gas," she said. "I've been out for a while. I suppose that was the gas?"

"Right." Doc indicated the boat with a general wave of a hand. "You just borrow this?"

She hesitated, then nodded. "That's right."

"Why did you happen to pick a boat?"

"Why, it was a natural thought because—" She stopped, bit her lip. "I better not tell you too much," she said.

Doc asked, "Do you mind going with me to call on Major Lowell?"

"I expected that," she said.

He thought her face got a little white. He asked her if she was afraid to go and see Major Lowell, and she did not answer. She made it plain that she was not going to answer any more of his questions.

He took her by the arm. She did not fight him.

He led her out on deck, closing the door behind him, and pulled on the springlines until the boat was close to the dock. He jumped ashore keeping hold of the girl's arm.

Two shadows arose from the blacker shadows of boxes on the dock. Both shadows were very tall, and one was quite wide, the other one unbelievably thin.

"Going somewhere?" asked the bigger shadow in a rumbling voice.

"Take is easy, Renny," Doc said.

The thinner shadow said, "I'll be superamalgamated."

The two were Renny Renwick and Johnny Littlejohn, the other two aids who had been instructed to meet Doc in Washington.

"How did you happen to come down here?" Doc asked.

Renny said, "We got hold of Monk and Ham. They told us you had come down here alone to meet Major Lowell. So we barged down just to keep an eye on things."

Doc nodded. "How are Monk and Ham coming in the parrot matter?"

"They've got quite a stir-up," Renny said. "We heard the radio broadcast coming down in the plane."

"You flew one of our planes?"

"Yes." Renny cleared his throat. "What's this all about, anyway? Who's the girl?"

"Hannah," Doc said, "these are two of my associates, Renny Renwick and Johnny Littlejohn."

Hannah said nothing.

"She's mad at me," Doc explained. "She could probably explain a great deal if she would, but she has the idea we are plotting against her."

Renny gave the girl only a critical inspection. He was not very susceptible to feminine charms.

“Renny,” Doc said, “this girl pretended to be T. Hannah, who is a private detective. She says her name is Hannah, and that T. Hannah is her half-sister. I want you to check on that. And find out what you can about this girl.”

“Get the low-down on her? Right,” Renny said.

He wasted no more words, left, striding through the darkness. His fists, very big, looked as if he had his hands shoved in gallon pails.

DOC SAVAGE had rented a car for the trip down to the boat earlier in the evening. It was a small sedan. Doc drove, the girl beside him, and Johnny rode in the back.

Johnny said not a word during the ride. When he spoke, he liked to use big words, enormous words of which almost no one knew the meaning. The words were his bad habit. He used them the way some men become addicted to tobacco or liquor. He never used his big words on Doc, however, because for some reason or other it made him feel like a kid showing off, although he never had the sensation with anyone else. So now he was silent.

Doc parked near one of the war department buildings. Although it was near midnight, the place seemed in full activity.

“Watch her,” Doc said. “I’m going to find out where we can locate Major Lowell.”

The bronze man entered the lighted building.

Johnny settled back and watched the girl. He watched her for some time, and then he said, “Stultiloquence is nugasititious, conceivably.”

Hannah stared at him.

“Could you do that again?” she asked.

Johnny did it again, but with smaller words. “Absurdity is childish, conceivably.”

“I still don’t get you.”

“The parrot and its nest.”

“Oh,” Hannah said.

“The thing is silly,” Johnny said.

Hannah compressed her lips. “If you think it’s silly, you’re crazy.”

“Then Doc is right. It’s important?”

“You’ll find out,” Hannah said.

And she would say no more.

Doc Savage came out of the war department building in about half an hour. He got behind the wheel and headed the car toward the Georgetown section.

“Major Lowell seems to be home,” he explained.

"You talk to him?" Johnny asked.

"No. Persuaded one of the clerks to call him and ask him a casual business question, to make sure he was there."

Hannah seemed puzzled. She watched the bronze man, as if suspecting that the conversation was intended to mislead her.

The car had a radio. Doc switched it on, and it played softly for a while. Then the announcer came on and said, *"This is a paid announcement. Will anyone knowing the whereabouts of the parrot and its nest, and the full story concerning the same, make contact with Room 7, the Riverside Building. Call in person. Do not telephone."*

Hannah stared at Doc Savage again, more puzzled than before.

"Look," she said unexpectedly. "You want a piece of advice?"

"Of what nature?"

"If you're innocent as you claim you are," she told Doc, "better drop it. Drop the whole thing."

"Why?"

"The kind of woods you're getting into," she said, "is no place to be walking around blind."

"Care to elaborate on that?"

She shook her head. "It's your funeral. And don't think there won't be one."

MAJOR LOWELL seemed to live in a boxlike house that stood in a great deal of shrubbery. Georgetown, now a part of Washington, was a town long before the city of Washington was even a dream. In the early days, it offered a much more sedate and satisfactory homesite than Washington, so that it became the section of aristocracy, of First Families. This house was one of the old, fine ones.

"A real precisianimistic abode," Johnny remarked.

Hannah said, "Such words!" disgustedly.

Doc Savage parked the car, and got out. He reached in for Hannah. She seemed surprised.

"You know," she said, "you act as if you really had no idea what this is all about."

Doc made no comment. They followed a curving walk of old brick, a walk bordered by a neatly trimmed hedge of box and many roses.

Doc Savage stopped suddenly and listened. He tested the air with his nostrils. Then, swiftly, he pushed the other two off the path and down into the black night shadow.

"What is it?" Johnny breathed.

"Odor of chloroform," Doc said. "Do you get it?"

Johnny sniffed vainly. He did not.

Doc Savage went away silently. He moved with remarkable silence. Hannah was watching him go, and she saw him go into the shadow of a tall, neatly trimmed arbor vitae, then wondered why he was there so long. Why he had not gone on. She was still wondering that when Doc rejoined them, coming from an entirely different direction, with the same ghostly quiet.

“Take a look at this,” he whispered.

“This” was a dog, a big Belgian shepherd with an impressive fang equipment. The animal was sprawled, with a snarl, in unconsciousness. It reeked of chloroform.

“Oh, oh!” Johnny said. “Something goes on here.”

Doc told him, “Stay close by. Keep the girl with you. Somebody might come to see if the dog is still unconscious.”

Again Doc left them silently.

This time, the bronze man went to the house and hunted for a lighted window. The entrance hall was illuminated, but not very brightly. Without getting too close, he saw that the hall was empty.

The other lighted window was on the second floor, and it was blanked out with Venetian blinds. There might be lights in other rooms, behind blackout curtains. It was hard to tell.

One of the simplest and most-used gadgets which Doc Savage carried was a collapsible metal grapple on the end of a long silk cord, that was knotted and looped at intervals so that it could be climbed. He used this now, and hung the grapple behind a chimney. He waited a while to learn whether the grapple had been heard hitting the roof. Apparently not.

He went up silently, found a second-floor window which was open. He had known it would be open because from below he had seen the curtains blowing out against the screen. The screen did not give his pocketknife much of an argument. He eased inside.

They were waiting inside for him, two of them with small-caliber revolvers which they had bundled in cloth—bed sheets it was evident later—to cut down their sound. The guns made a considerable noise even then, but they did not sound like guns, which probably was the idea. The men doing the shooting did not take a chance on a target as small as Doc's head, but fired at his body.

The revolvers were small enough that the cylinders held seven bullets apiece, instead of the usual six. Two guns, and hence fourteen bullets.

At the first impact, Doc's arms went over his head as if jerked by invisible strings. He did not fall immediately. The kick of the little bullets, their impact, was not terrific. But fourteen of them would have killed anything that walked the earth.

Not until the last bullet had hit him did Doc fall. Then he went down stiffly, not bending in any of his joints. He hit the floor hard. The crash jarred a picture off the wall somewhere near.

After he was on the floor, he convulsed several times, merely doubling knees against his chest, pumping motions. The bubbling and gurgling noises which accompanied this were not pleasant.

He relaxed and his face was up and his eyes were still.

## Chapter V. STONY

THERE was no noise but the heavy breathing of the two men with the guns, and small, metallic clicking sounds as they madly stuffed cartridges into their guns.

“Turn on the light,” one said.

The other turned on the light. Both of them stared at Doc Savage.

Their faces turned from ruddy to buff to pale tan to cardboard. They looked at each other.

One said, “I know this guy. It's Doc Savage!”

The other opened his mouth and said a sick something with his lips only. Then he put his chin on his chest and piled down on the floor. He had fainted.

The other man looked foolish. Then he tried to laugh. The laugh didn't come off. He went to the door and bellowed, “Hey, down there, come up here and see who we got!”

Men came up the stairs noisily, four of them, and there was movement of men in other parts of the house. Everybody seemed to be armed. They stared at Doc.

“Doc Savage,” said the man who had done the shooting.

A man said, “Major Lowell will know if it's Savage.” He went to the door, and yelled, “Bring that dumb soldier up here.”

Movement could be heard on the first floor.

There was no sound from outdoors, nothing to show that Johnny and Hannah were doing anything. They certainly had heard the shots.

A man went to the window and put it down. He stood looking out for a few seconds. “I see some lighted windows,” he said. “People heard those shots, and got up.”

“If they don't hear any more, they'll go back to bed,” a man told him. “We'll have to take a chance they do, anyhow.”

Two or more men were coming up the stairs. From the sounds, they were struggling along with someone who was bound hand and foot, but who was still fighting them. The bound man was evidently gagged, because he made hissings and buzzings in his efforts to yell out for help.

A man pointed at the fellow on the floor. “What happened to Big Toe?”

“Big Toe fainted,” said the man who had helped shoot Doc. He tried another laugh, but that one didn't come off either.

“If that's really Doc Savage,” someone said, “I don't *blame* Big Toe for fainting.”

“It must be Savage,” said the first. “Big Toe ain't the fainting type, by a long shot.”

“Major Lowell will know.”

“What makes you think he'll tell us.”

The men bringing the bound-and-gagged man up the stairs came inside. They were having some trouble.

One of them cursed the men in the room, and added, “You might have given us some help. What the hell

are you guys, ornaments?”

All of the men, except for Major Lowell, had two things in common. They were all older men, men too old for the draft. They had a shifty, vicious air that crooks get after they have been crooks for a long time, not a definite stamp that would instantly identify them, but a quality that was very noticeable when a number of the same ilk were in a group.

Hired talent. It was stamped all over them.

Major Lowell was a different type, a fine, upstanding man with graying hair and the leathery face of a military man who had seen service in the tropics. He had a jaw that looked as if it was accustomed to pushing things out of the way.

They took the gag off Lowell's mouth. Major Lowell stared at Doc Savage.

“Doc Savage!” he said hoarsely. “What have you done to him?”

There was a brief and somehow terrible silence in the room.

Then a man said, “If that's Savage, we want to be damned sure he is dead.”

He took out a gun and leaned to put it against Doc's temple. Reaching up, Doc got hold of the man's arm and the gun and pushed the weapon aside.

SURPRISE helped a little. Plenty of help was needed. The little bullets had not done much harm, nothing more than inflict considerable pain, through the bulletproof alloy mesh undergarment which Doc Savage always wore. He had been lying there faking, hoping to hear something of interest. But, since they were about to dispatch him with a shot in the head, there was nothing to do but try to get out of it.

Lying here, a remark had popped into his thoughts, one that Monk had once made after a fight in which he took a shellacking.

Monk liked to fight. He was good. Usually he did well, but this time they had taken him apart. When Ham and the others had finally gotten Monk out of the mess, Monk lay on his back and scowled at them and said, “Just like rainbows, you guys—never around until the storm is over!”

Surprise helped, all right. It helped a lot. Doc got the man's gun as easily as if the fellow had been handing it to him.

Surprise held them all stiff while Doc got to his feet. Then Doc made a mistake. There were obviously too many men in the room for anyone to fight single-handed. So Doc tried to go out of the window. He tried to back out, so the glass would not cut him as much, smashing the frame, then hanging by his knees just long enough to give himself a flip that would land him on his feet on the ground.

It was not a difficult trick, except that it was a steel-framed window. He didn't back out. There was no time to raise the window, although he tried. It was stuck. Probably the force with which he had backed into it had jammed it. He hadn't noticed it was a steel window.

The men were getting over their surprise now.

Light. The light was the devilish thing. Doc threw the gun at the fixture. It gave out blue fire and a shower of glass, and there was darkness.

He made for the door, hitting the floor very hard with his feet.

In an old house like this, it wasn't the natural thing to find metal windows. That was what had thrown him off.

He put his feet down hard until he was almost at the door, then he stopped moving, but still kept putting his feet down hard. He was pleased with that. It sounded as if he had run on out of the door.

He stepped to one side, against the wall, and waited.

“The stairs!” a man howled. “Get him!”

There should have been a rush for the door. There wasn't. Nobody was too anxious to lead the chase, apparently. Each one of them was waiting for another fellow to start it.

The man who had given the order, cursed them. He said no more than a dozen words, but the paint should have curled on the woodwork.

“Get going, or I'll shoot every damned one of you!” he finished.

That put them in motion. It was very dark. They converged on the door in a pack.

Doc Savage reached out, found a neck, and took it. He made no effort to break the neck, although it was feasible. It was his policy, and had always been, never to take a human life if it could possibly be helped.

Feeling of the neck gave the location of the owner's temple. He banged it with his knuckles, hit the man's jaw also. He lowered the fellow and reached for another.

He hit the next one without taking hold of him. The man fell against another, went to the floor.

“Quit shoving me!” somebody said.

“Shoving? Who's shoving?” another growled.

Then two of them fell over the body of the man Doc had knocked out, the last one.

“He's in here!” a voice yelled. “Hell, he's in here!”

DOC got away from the door fast. It was a good idea. From all around the door—gunfire!

One shot-flame would not give you light enough to see much. But muzzle flash from so many guns would.

Doc Savage sank down and got hold of the carpet, a firm hold, and pulled. It was an old trick. It was not even a very good one, because the carpet was tacked down.

But he pulled and pulled hard, and the tacks came out. There were newspapers for padding under the carpet. The carpet slid on these. Men started losing their balance.

After he had yanked the carpet about a yard, Doc ran with it, throwing it up high, getting it over as many of the men as he could, the way one would throw a blanket over an object.

It was not entirely successful, but it helped. Furniture clattered around, and something of glass that had been on a stand table broke noisily, popping.

Doc got on top of the carpet and jumped on men and kicked men for a while, on his way to the door.

He reached the stairs and went down them lightly.

The whole house was dark. Obviously, the fuse of the light circuit had been blown when he smashed the light in the room.

The dark inside of the house made the moonlight outside seem quite bright when the front door opened.

Two men had thrown open the front door from the inside. They had heard someone come up on the porch, had thrown the door open as if in welcome. It was Johnny and Hannah who had come up on the porch.

The pair who had opened the door pulled a smart piece of business.

“Come in and help us!” one of them yelled in a loud, friendly, anxious voice.

Johnny was taken in. It was no reflection on Johnny's common sense. Such acting would have fooled anyone.

Johnny started to come in, and was hit over the head. He fell like a dropped armload of stove wood.

Doc's “Watch out!” was too late.

Hannah then put on what Doc Savage considered a remarkable performance.

The second man made a confident swing, intending to club her over the head. His blow missed. It was a little weird, the way Hannah avoided the swing. She doubled over and came around with one foot out, and hooked the man's legs from under him.

She ran across the kicking and yelling man as if she was walking an animated log. It must have been unpleasant for the fellow, because she wore high heels.

She got hold of the other man, the one who had felled Johnny. She gave him a knee. She took his arm and turned her back to him and did a jujitsu throw. The man went over her head, hit the floor, seemed to bounce a foot.

Hannah kicked each fallen man in the temple in a way which showed she had made men unconscious before.

“Where are the rest of them?” she asked Doc.

She sounded as if she was just getting warmed up.

DOC SAVAGE got her, hauled her out of the hall through the first door handy. Cooked food odors, roast beef, and the slickness of a linoleum floor indicated they were in a kitchen.

Upstairs, the men were howling and stamping around and shooting in a general fashion.

“Come on,” Hannah said to Doc. “What are you waiting on?”

Doc kept his hold on her. “Are you bulletproof?” he asked.

She subsided somewhat. “I guess you're right,” she said.

No one was coming down the stairs yet. Doc made a run, got Johnny's unconscious, gangling length, and brought the burden into the kitchen. He felt around and found a broom closet. He stood Johnny up in that, and shut the door quickly. Johnny was so long that standing was the only position in which the closet would hold him.

Upstairs, the man with the loudest profanity was getting order out of chaos.

“Quiet! Quiet!” he screamed. “Damn you, listen to me!”

He got them to listen.

“The boss says take Major Lowell and get out of here!” he shrieked.

A man interrupted with a fit of coughing and shrieking. His yelling had a liquid quality that indicated a bullet in the chest. Apparently he knew who had shot him accidentally. He pleaded for a gun to get revenge.

There was a blow, and he was silent.

“Take Lowell and get out!” yelled the loud voice. “That's orders, boss says. All of you!”

“But Savage is—”

“Of course he's around here! Why the hell do you think the boss wants us to leave.” He swore violently. “Push Lowell out the window. Quick!”

There was stamping around. Men grunted and swore as they made the long jump to the ground from the window.

Someone must have objected to the strategy, because the loud voice bellowed, “Hell, we only came here to get Lowell. He's the guy we want. Take him and get out.”

Doc Savage had found a pottery jar. Size and shape of the thing told him it was a Mexican piece. He put it on the end of a mop stick, and put it around the edge of the door. The dark-tan color of the bowl would make it look enough like his head.

There was a man at the head of the stairs. The fellow turned loose with some kind of light machine gun. The pottery jar exploded in pieces.

The man with the machine gun kept shooting, sweeping the bullet stream along the wall. Doc jumped wildly backward, pursued by flying splinters. He got down, changed direction, scooped Hannah up bodily, headed for the other end of the kitchen with her.

“They are organized now,” he said. “If they get away from us, we will be very lucky.”

But he found a back door, opened it, and went outside.

DOC was now at the back of the house. There was a steady noise from the front. Not as much profanity now, and more words that made sense. From the orders, he could tell generally what they were doing. They had Major Lowell on the ground, and all the wounded and unconscious men. They were taking these to a car somewhere near.

Doc had one explosive grenade, without gas, in his pockets. He short-fused it with the adjusting knob,

and gave it an Andy-over heave over the house.

The explosion broke window lights in the house, and shook the neighborhood. It started a neighbor yelling that there was an air raid, bombs, Germans and Japs. The man sounded hysterical.

The blast also accelerated the retreat considerably. Doc had the disgusted suspicion that it accomplished nothing more.

He had three gas grenades. The anaesthetic gas. These were small glasslike globules, and he threw them. They did not make an explosion when they burst.

He started working his way around to the front of the house, to do whatever he could do.

There was shrubbery, big and thick and made of thorns. He got into the stuff, then backed out again, thwarted and scratched. He tried another route.

The men were still shouting to each other. They were more relieved now. They were more sure of escape.

He heard one yelled sentence that was interesting.

“Drive straight to the planes!” bellowed the loud voice. “Get Major Lowell aboard, take off, and head for the island. Head out to sea, so these damned aircraft listening posts along the coast won't spot us!”

Plane—Major Lowell aboard—head out to sea—*island!* There were lots of islands in the world. The words stuck in Doc's mind.

They were gone when he reached the front of the house. Three carloads of them, making much noise, plunging down a long driveway.

They reached the street. There were some shots. They kept going.

Suspecting the last shots had been directed at his car, Doc ran to the street. The tires, the two rear ones on his car, were flat from bullet holes.

He went back to the house. “It's Doc,” he called by way of precaution.

Hannah came out on the porch.

“They got their two men who were here in the door,” she said. “The pair I landed on.” She sounded disgusted.

Doc Savage went inside the house and located the fuse box. With lights in the house, he searched. There was no sign of the enemy. Not a single unconscious man. They had succeeded in removing everyone.

“Darn it!” Hannah said. “You let them all get away!”

DOC SAVAGE said nothing, uncomfortably. It was his private opinion that they had done well to survive the affair. Hannah seemed to think differently.

He examined Hannah when she was not looking. She had the appearance of being a very attractive young woman, brown and healthy, definitely not difficult on the eyes. She looked like any other nice, pretty girl. But she wasn't like any other nice, pretty girl. That was obvious.

Doc went downstairs to the broom closet in the kitchen.

Johnny was saying, "I'll be superamalgamated!" over and over in the closet. He sounded confused.

Doc got him out of the closet.

Hannah looked at Johnny with no approval. "You were a great help," she said.

"You hit me," Johnny accused her. He was still dazed.

Hannah shrugged. "I kind of wish I had," she said. "You're a bunch of false storms, if you ask me. Here I've been hearing for years about the great Doc Savage."

Johnny winced. He fell back on his big words and said, "A tramontanelly amphigouristic misventure."

Hannah stared at him, and finally laughed. There was no anger, no dislike in her laughter by the time it ended.

"Maybe you'll do better when you get warmed up," she said.

Most of the houses in the neighborhood were now lighted. The neighbors were shouting to each other, asking the questions they might be expected to ask after their sleep had been shattered by such a bedlam. One man, in a loud, belligerent voice, was standing at the gate and shouting, "What's wrong in there? What happened?" He did not come closer, and kept repeating his inquiry. He was taking no chances.

Doc Savage asked, "Johnny, can you help us go over the house? We might do that and get away before the police come."

"You afraid of the police?" Hannah demanded.

Doc pretended not to hear the question.

Johnny, however, said indignantly, "We're not afraid of the police. But the police expect you to answer questions, particularly when there's a war going on. Before we get through the red tape, we might lose half the night."

"That sounds like sense," Hannah admitted.

"It sounds," said Johnny, "as if you're afraid of the police."

Hannah looked at him strangely. And her reply was not happy.

"I don't know whether I am or not," she said. "I wish I did know."

They found the leathery man in an upstairs clothes-closet. Doc found him.

Leathery was the word. The stuff they use to cover saddles—a thick, tough brown hide, with here and there chalk marks that were pale traces of old scars.

Not that he was a repellent man. He wasn't. He was big, not nearly as large as Doc Savage nor as tall as the bony Johnny, but nevertheless large. About six feet, and not fat. His age was uncertain, something beyond forty, but not much more. His hair was very white at the temples, like cotton tufts over his ears at first glance.

He wore tight cowboy pants and riding boots. His coat and vest were the same material as the pants, but

cut in suit style. It was an expensive tailoring job, a regular drape-suit model, except for the tight riding pants.

Some crimson had come out of his nostrils and pooled on the floor. Another string of it had left a cut in his forehead and crawled, because of the way he was lying in the closet, back into his hair.

He was breathing heavily, making harsh sounds.

Doc examined him, rolled back the lids from the eyes, felt pulse and tested reactions.

“Drugged,” Doc said.

Hannah had been in another room. She came in. She stared at the unconscious man, her mouth widely open.

“Now we're getting somewhere.” She pointed at the man. “He's the answer to it.”

“You know him?” Doc asked.

“Stony Smith,” she said. “Of course, I know the rascal!”

## **Chapter VI. PIRATES FOR ANCESTORS**

THEY left the house then, carrying Stony Smith between them. They went out the back way, reached a side street. But one of the neighbors saw them, and started following them, not coming close, but calling out suspicious questions. Hannah turned, took two steps toward the man who was following them, and fired a revolver into the ground. The gun was one she had picked up somewhere. The curious neighbor turned and bolted.

“You'll get us all thrown in jail,” Johnny complained. “He'll swear to the police that you shot at him.”

“That'll be one of our lesser troubles, if you ask me,” Hannah said.

They found, by good luck, a taxicab which was empty. They climbed inside, Hannah allaying the driver's suspicions about the unconscious Stony Smith by saying, “You'd think a guy could carry his liquor better than that.”

Doc gave the address of the small hotel which they normally used for headquarters.

He settled back and looked at Hannah. “Now, let's have your story,” he said.

“I'm mixed up,” Hannah said. “I was sure you and Major Lowell were pulling a frame-up against me—”

“See if you can't tell a clear story,” Doc said. “Begin with you. Who are you?”

She frowned, then shrugged and said, “I guess that's the way to do it. My last name is Hannah. Wiliia. Wiliia Hannah. My dad wanted a boy, and he never got over my being a girl. I live on Geography Cay, an island in the Caribbean. Dad lived there. The Hannahs, all of them, for three hundred years, have lived on Geography Cay. They're the kings of Geography Cay. The islands around Geography Cay have an economy that may strike you as strange. We own the islands, and yet we don't own them. The islands belong to the natives, a kind of community ownership. But we Hannahs are kings over the natives. That should make us own the islands, but it doesn't, if you get what I mean.”

She shrugged. “Enough for me. Oh, yes—my half-sister, T. Hannah. She is dad's daughter by his first wife. His first wife left him, ran off. She couldn't stand Geography Cay, and I don't think she could stand dad. The island and my dad are like that. Either you can stand them or you can't.”

The taxicab crossed the Pennsylvania Avenue bridge over Rock Creek, leaving Georgetown and entering the city of Washington.

“That,” said Hannah, “is enough background of me. But I should say one thing more about the island. Geography Cay is located in a handy spot for two things. First, an air base there would enable planes to take a big part in defending the Panama Canal. Second, planes based there could do a lot toward hunting down submarines in the current war.”

The taxi driver was showing no interest.

Hannah said, “But there isn't a place on the island fit for a flying field.”

She said it violently. She stared at them with an expression of rage.

“Another island, about sixty miles away,” she said, “is the proper place for the flying field.”

“You mean,” Doc said, “that the American government is going to put a flying field in that section.”

She nodded. “Either on my island, or on Happy Bones.”

“Happy Bones—that is the other island?”

“Right.”

“Who owns it?”

“Stony Smith.” She pointed at the unconscious leathery man. “Him!”

THEIR taxicab was tied up now in a traffic jam. Evidently some kind of night shift was going off duty in one of the big government office buildings. Johnny tapped impatiently on the driver's window and said, “A satuvolicly somniferous ergophobia is unnecessary.”

The driver did not bat an eye.

“Sure, buddy,” he said. “That's a good gag.”

Doc Savage told Hannah, “Suppose you make a clearer statement about this flying field thing.”

She nodded.

“The United States armed forces need an airport in the section, either on Happy Bones or Geography Cay. The establishing of the airport is in the hands of Major Lowell. A survey of both islands has been made. I was called to Washington to talk over the deal for the use of my island for an airport site. I came. But it was ridiculous.”

“What made it ridiculous?” Doc asked.

“There is no place on my island suitable for an airport.”

“What about the other island, Happy Bones?”

“Perfect spot.”

Doc indicated the unconscious man. “And this fellow, Stony Smith, owns Happy Bones?”

“That's right.”

The traffic jam melted and their cab got moving again. The hotel was not far ahead.

Doc Savage said, “To sum it up, there is a project to put an airport on an island in the Caribbean. You were called to Washington to consult with the government agent in charge of the project—Major Lowell. You do not think your island, Geography Cay, is a suitable spot. You think Happy Bones Island, owned by Stony Smith, is a better location.”

“That,” said Hannah, “puts it all in the same keg.”

“It doesn't,” Doc said, “give any motives for what happened tonight.”

“Oh, that,” said Hannah. “Well, here is what happened. When I first talked to Major Lowell, I got the idea something was—”

She fell silent, glanced at the back of the cab driver's head.

“Tell you later,” she said.

The cab driver snorted loudly. “Lady,” he said, “you make me feel like an enemy spy.”

THEY got out at the hotel, took Stony Smith inside. Hannah paid the cab driver, then grabbed his cap brim and yanked it down over his eyes, seized his necktie, yanked it very tight and tied it in a hard knot. “Talk wise, will you,” she said.

Doc saw Johnny grinning faintly. Johnny was amused by Hannah. Doc thought: *Wait until she gets hold of you!*

Monk and Ham and Renny had taken a suite on the second floor, rear, away from the street. “Where,” Johnny explained, “we figured it wouldn't be too easy to toss a bomb in the window.”

There was no sign of Monk, Ham or Renny.

“I thought they were supposed to be here,” Johnny said. “Monk and Ham were advertising for a parrot and its nest. And Renny was supposed to be checking up on Hannah, here.”

“Checking up on me, eh?” Hannah said indignantly. “I'll pay you fifty dollars for every word I've told you that is a lie.”

Doc Savage placed Stony Smith on the bed. There was no question but that the man had been drugged. Doc said, “Johnny, will you go down and get some stuff to revive him.” The bronze man wrote out a prescription, which Johnny took with him as he departed.

Hannah looked suspiciously in closets, glanced under the bed, and inspected the windows. She made a trip around the room looking behind pictures and examining the walls closely, obviously to see if there was a microphone hidden.

“Here's the rest of it,” she said. “This is why I acted as I did tonight. First, when I talked to Major

Lowell, I immediately knew something was wrong.”

“He told you there was?”

“He didn't tell me anything,” Hannah said. “But I know. Listen, my grand-daddy was a pirate. His father was a pirate. My dad was a pirate. I suppose I'm one, at heart. For about a dozen generations, we've handled the natives on Geography Cay. The natives are pirates. With them, something is wrong all the time. If not, they make it wrong. Don't tell me I can't feel when something is wrong.”

Doc Savage let it go. “And so?” he prompted.

“So I got busy keeping my eyes open,” Hannah said. “In fact, I snooped. I found out enough to alarm me.”

“Which was?”

“That Major Lowell was having me followed. Trailed around.”

“What did you do then?”

“Why, I gave him his own medicine. I trailed him around. I saw him make a wire-record, and go to a lot of trouble making up a package and sending it off. So I got the package.”

“How did you get it?”

“That was simple. I got a look at the package, made up a duplicate, and swapped it for the real one after he gave it to an express messenger. The express messenger was about sixty years old, and thought he was a diller with the ladies. It was easy to take him in.”

Doc said, “I did not get any package.”

“The fake I substituted had a different address.”

Johnny came back with the filled prescription. He asked immediately if there had been any word from Monk, Ham or Renny, and showed plainly that he was worried that there had not been anything from them.

Doc Savage looked at Hannah. “Your story is a little thin,” he said.

“Well, it's the truth.”

“Thin,” Doc said, “because it omitted the matter of a green parrot and its nest.”

Hannah looked startled. “Oh! Now I bet you think I'm a liar. I overlooked that part.”

“Suppose you add that part to the collection,” Doc suggested.

She nodded. “I told you I was following Major Lowell around?”

“Yes.”

“Well, I was outside his window at night. He was talking to someone. I don't know who. I don't know whether it was a man or woman, even, because the individual was speaking in a very low voice. Major Lowell was angry. He did some shouting. That was why I heard him.”

She looked at them earnestly. She sounded as if she was telling the truth.

“Major Lowell shouted,” she said, “to this other person. He shouted that he had looked at the green parrot and its nest. He shouted that it was the most devilish, inhuman, unholy and fiendish thing he'd ever heard of. He was very angry. Then he ordered this other person out of the house.”

“Didn't you see the other person in the act of leaving?”

“No. I had bad luck. The person used a side door, and I expected the front door would be used. I was watching the front door.”

“That is all you know about the parrot and its nest?”

“Yes.”

DOC SAVAGE gave the prescription, the one Johnny had just had filled, to Stony Smith. The stuff was largely a stimulant, although to some extent it would aid in counteracting the effects of the drug.

They washed Stony Smith's face. He was not seriously injured.

They also searched Stony Smith. There was not a thing in any of his pockets except a handkerchief and an almost new billfold containing four thousand eight hundred and seventy dollars in old-style, large bills.

Johnny remarked about the bills.

“Big ones,” he said. “Why, the government stopped printing this size quite a few years ago.”

“He's probably a hoarder,” Hannah said. “I wouldn't put anything past him.”

Johnny grinned at her. “Coming from a descendant of pirates, isn't that a case of the pot calling the kettle black?”

“There are pirates,” Hannah said, “and pirates.”

Stony Smith emitted a groan, a tremendously gusty groan; and then while he was still groaning, he had Johnny Littlejohn by the neck, was trying to get off the bed and behind it and choke Johnny at the same time. Doc Savage got hold of Smith and slammed him down on the bed and held him.

Stony Smith released his grip. He looked at them.

“I am sorry, verily I am,” he said. “I awaken like an animal.”

He glanced around at the room.

“I take it I am among friends,” he said. “That is good. It is a welcome change.”

They began now to see the startling difference between his appearance and his speech. He was a leathery-looking man, one that short words would seem to fit, words of action. Actually his voice was deep, his speech pompous, his words and his sentences a little archaic, as if they had come out of Shakespeare or some other old work.

“I do believe,” he said, “that you are the individual known as Doc Savage.”

Doc admitted it, and introduced Johnny. He also introduced Hannah, and Stony Smith winced, and said, “I know the maiden, indeed I do.”

“That's right, you rat-with-words,” Hannah said. “We know each other, all right.”

Stony Smith sat up. He looked like a man you would call Stony. He certainly did not talk like one.

“I hope the maid's strong opinions do not prejudice you gentlemen too much,” he said. “Words a very black, smelly coat can easily make, you know.”

“Tar and feathers,” said Hannah, “would fit you better.”

Stony Smith shrugged. “She likes me not. I skinned her out of her sea-shell market in an honest deal, once upon a time. The thorn is still in her flesh.”

“An honest deal,” said Hannah, “is something you wouldn't know if you met it.”

Stony grinned, which gave his thin, bony face a startlingly devillike took. “A deal, let us say,” he said. “Honesty is a flexible word, I always say.”

He turned to Doc and Johnny. “I am Stony Smith. I live on Happy Bones Island in the Caribbean. Stony Smith, king of Happy Bones. I sell sea shells. My motto: 'Smith Sells Sea Shells.’”

“He also sells devilment,” Hannah said.

DOC SAVAGE told Stony Smith, “We are interested in your more recent history.”

Smith nodded.

“Tonight, you mean?” he said. “Verily, it was a sad evening.”

He looked at them grimly.

“A fortnight past, a message came to me asking me to be in Washington at once. The object, to discuss using my island, Happy Bones, as an airport site. Major Lowell sent the radiogram to me—”

“You don't have a radio on Happy Bones,” Hannah interjected.

“We do. We are more modern than you think.”

Doc Savage said, “Let us keep on the subject of this trip you made to Washington to see Major Lowell.”

Stony Smith nodded. “Assuredly, if the wench will stop interrupting me.”

“Wench!” Hannah said. “Keep a civil tongue in that head, you baboon!”

Stony Smith told Doc, “I came to Washington and sought to confer with Major Lowell. I did confer with him. I assured him my island was a perfect site for the projected flying field, and that I would donate the island—”

“There,” interrupted Hannah, “is a lie on the face of it. You never donated anything to nothing in your life!”

“—donate the island for a suitable remuneration,” continued Stony Smith. “But imagine my astonishment when I found that this wench, this Hannah, was attempting to force the government to use her island, Geography Cay, and pay her a nice profit.”

Hannah stared at him.

She seemed struck speechless.

“Hannah's island is worthless for an airport,” said Stony Smith, “because there is no spot level enough for a runway.”

Hannah stood very still, getting red and beginning to look like a firecracker preparing to explode.

“Major Lowell asked me to come back tonight,” said Stony Smith. “And while I was there, those rascals came upon the scene. They pummeled me unmercifully, injected some concoction into me and made me swallow pills. This produced in me a state of unconsciousness which seems to have persisted until a few minutes ago.”

Hannah put both hands on her hips. Her hands were fists.

Stony Smith pointed at her.

“This hen-hussy,” he said, “is probably at the bottom of whatever rascality is afoot.”

Hannah seemed on the verge of giving off sparks.

“Hen-hussy,” she said. “Well, what do you know!”

HANNAH then leaned forward, took hold of one of Stony Smith's arms, the left one, and proceeded to try to remove the arm from the body. She was strong and she knew jujitsu. Stony Smith bawled like a bull with a twisted tail. “Don't! I'm a sick man!” he squalled.

“You'll know what sick is,” Hannah said, “when I get done with you.”

Johnny, alarmed, sprang forward and grasped Hannah, saying, “Now, now, lacination is hebetudinous.”

Doc Savage decided to look on. He was glad Johnny had taken the initiative. In any dealings with Hannah, where force was involved, he preferred to be a bystander. It was against his conscientious scruples to pick up the handiest object and knock a woman senseless, which was the only feasible way of dealing with Hannah.

Stony Smith stopped yelling. Johnny began. Hannah seemed hardly to take hold of Johnny, and he was on the floor. Hannah immediately walked the length of his gaunt kicking frame, high heels and all.

“Call me a crook, will you!” Hannah cried.

She grabbed one of Stony Smith's hands and bent it back agonizingly.

“I'll settle this myself,” Hannah said angrily. “Because you fellows don't show any signs of knowing what it is all about.”

Johnny was gasping from pain. Stony Smith was howling.

“You,” Hannah told Doc, “are a big, handsome false alarm!”

She picked up a chair and threw it at Doc, who dodged successfully.

Hannah then walked out of the room, without bothering to lock the door.

“You try following me,” she said, “and I’ll wring me some necks.”

Stony Smith stopped howling, and shouted, “Stop her! Catch her!”

Doc Savage looked at him and said, “Go right ahead. She should be easy to catch.”

Stony Smith looked thoughtful.

“Verily, brother,” he said. “Not I. Thanks.”

Doc glanced at Johnny. “Chase her, Johnny.”

Johnny snorted. “I’ll run from her,” he said. “I won’t chase her.”

## Chapter VII. AIR TRAIL

DOC SAVAGE opened the bedroom window. There was a narrow alleyway outside. He pointed a flashlight beam down, saw that the alley pavement was smooth, no ruts to turn an ankle, or boxes or barrels. He went out of the window and dropped.

From the alley mouth, he could see the hotel entrance. He waited there watching.

He heard Stony Smith, at the window, say, “Verily, the drop should have broken the man’s bones.”

He heard Johnny say, “An anthropological Brobdingnagian.”

“Would you ring that bell again,” said Stony Smith.

“I just remarked,” said Johnny, “that Doc is a physical marvel.”

“Verily,” agreed Stony Smith. “But what a way of saying it.”

Hannah came out of the hotel then, and Doc heard no more of the conversation above. Hannah walked with the quick, purposeful strides of a young woman who was angry and doing something about it.

She was obviously looking for a cab. Doc was fortunate, and got a cab before she found one. It was a piece of luck. He directed his machine down the block, loitered, and was handy when Hannah got a taxi.

She drove straight to an airport, where she paid and dismissed the cab driver.

The airport was one which also accommodated seaplanes. Hannah opened a locker in the office, one which obviously she had rented the way you rent lockers in railway stations. It was even the same dime-in-a-slot-and-you-get-the-key type found in bus and railway depots.

From the rented locker, Hannah took a pair of coveralls, a small handbag. She went into the rest room and came out shortly wearing the coveralls.

She had a conference with the airport officials. They rolled a plane out of a hangar for her.

It was a two-motored seaplane, a cabin job which would accommodate more than a dozen passengers. The plane was neither cheap nor shoddy, although it was not fast by military standards.

While the plane was being put in the water and floated off its wheel cradle, Hannah visited the C. A. A. weather station and got weather reports, and apparently filed a flight plan and went through the other

details necessary before a civilian plane could use the air along the coast.

She went to her plane, got in and took off. She disappeared into the south.

Doc Savage visited the C. A. A. office and made his identity known. He showed credentials which would get him information.

“Where is she headed?” he asked.

“For Geography Cay, in the Caribbean. That is supposed to be her home.”

“I take it she had the authority to have such a flight plan approved.”

“She did. She flew in from Geography Cay several days ago. Major Lowell, who is doing important procurement emergency work, arranged approval of her flight. At the same time, he also arranged an O. K. on her return flight, effective whenever she wished to leave.”

“She came alone?”

“Yes.”

“Is there,” Doc asked, “much chance of her getting off the route she filed in her flight plan without it being known? In other words, could she say she was going to Geography Cay, and go somewhere else?”

The C. A. A. attendant grinned. “I don't think so. With this defense plane-spotting set-up, they can keep track of an individual duck flying south, if they want to.”

“Will you get me an hourly report on her progress?” Doc asked.

“Sure.”

JOHNNY LITTLEJOHN was excited when Doc returned to the hotel suite. He looked as if he wanted to wave his arms. He had their equipment cases on the bed and packed. He had put Stony Smith to work packing clothes into suitcases.

“Your bait,” Johnny yelled at Doc, “caught a fish.”

“What bait?”

“The parrot and its nest.”

“Just what,” Doc asked, “did we catch?”

Johnny waved at the telephone. “I think Renny's still holding the wire.”

Renny was.

Renny said, “Holy cow, Doc! I think we've got something. I'm calling from an oyster fisherman's shack on the north bank of the Potomac River about thirty miles out of Washington. Monk and Ham are here.”

He stopped speaking. Apparently, he was listening.

“We're waiting,” he said, “for two plane-loads of guys to take off.”

“How did you get on this trail?” Doc asked.

“The advertising for a parrot and a nest. Monk and Ham put an address in the advertisement, if you remember. Well, they watched the place. A couple of suspicious-acting guys showed up. What made them suspicious was the fact that they had a couple of rifles in a golf bag, and a bomb in a bowling-ball-carrying bag. Monk and Ham found that out. So they kept track of the pair.

“About an hour ago,” Renny continued, “the pair got a hurry-up visit from a third guy, who was excited. They all climbed in a car, and rushed out of Washington and down the Potomac to this place, where they had a pair of seaplanes waiting.

“In a little while, some more guys showed up. They had a man with them, tied hand and foot, and gagged. We think he's that Major Lowell.

“So,” Renny concluded, “here we are waiting for them to take off so we can follow them.”

“What are you going to do, outrun the plane?” Doc asked.

“Oh, Monk and Ham have got the plane that Johnny and I came down from New York in,” Renny explained. “They're loafing around about twelve thousand feet in the air, far enough up that their motors can't be heard.”

“Don't lose the two planes.”

“We won't,” Renny said. “These fellows apparently are going to taxi their ships well out on the river before they take off. The river is wide here.”

“How do you know they will do that?”

“These seaplanes are equipped with outboard motor brackets. They're attaching outboards to them now, so it looks as if they're going to get out of earshot, down where the river is very wide, before they take off.”

Doc Savage did not keep the satisfaction out of his voice.

“Follow them,” he said. “And keep in contact with me by ultra-short wave.”

AS soon as Doc Savage put down the telephone, Stony Smith turned around and waved his arms indignantly.

“Those are my planes!” Smith shouted. “They're stealing them!”

Doc Savage examined the man thoughtfully. “You have not mentioned flying up here in two planes to consult with Major Lowell.”

“Twas oversight on my part,” said Stony Smith. “I flew but one plane. The other one was in Baltimore, being overhauled. It was one I bought recently, a second-hand ship considered too slow for military service, hence released to me by special permit.”

The man sounded enraged.

Doc asked, “Why do you think they are stealing your planes?”

“It is the work of that wench, Hannah!” Stony Smith yelled. “My kingdom against a . . . a . . . a snap of the fingers that it is!”

The statement about a kingdom was ridiculous enough to make Johnny Littlejohn, who was not easily moved by humor, grin slightly.

“Can you prove Hannah is behind this?” Doc asked.

“Why, anybody who knows vixen would know—” He stopped, was silent, chewed a lip, and shrugged. “I sooth, I cannot prove a thing,” he said. “But when one's chickens are coming up missing and there is a hawk flying around—” He shrugged again.

Johnny asked him curiously, “What put you down so on the girl?”

“All over the Caribbean,” said Stony Smith, “she is known as the descendent of those pirate Hannahs, and as testy a Hannah as there has been.”

“Just why,” Johnny asked, “do you need two seaplanes?”

Stony Smith blinked at them. “My shell business, naturally. It is cheaper to transport my shells by air.”

“What kind of shells?”

“Sea shells, I have told you.”

“Sea shells don't usually make up airplane cargoes.”

“They are carved shells. You will understand when I show them to you.” Stony Smith eyed them grimly. “You understand, of course, that I am going with you in pursuit of those planes.”

Johnny expected Doc to put his foot down and veto that immediately. But the bronze man made no objections.

“They are my planes,” Stony Smith said. “I am going to help get them back—and get at the bottom of the mystery.”

“One question we would like to ask you,” Doc said.

“Verily, ask it.”

“What do you know about a green parrot and its nest?”

Stony Smith blinked at them.

“If there be such a thing, I know nothing of it,” he said. “But I will say, i'faith, that it sounds about as sensible as a fish in a tree.”

DOC SAVAGE'S private plane, in which they took off for the pursuit of the two seaplanes, was an experimental amphibian design. Doc had developed the craft as part of his work in the war effort.

It was Doc's private feeling that designing planes and other fighting gadgets was not the way he should be in the war. He liked action too well to be satisfied with that. But his numerous attempts to get in the shooting war had not been successful. He did not understand the War Department's insistence that he

should confine himself to special jobs—of which this might possibly be one. The War Department, on the other hand, professed to not understand why Doc thought he was not seeing enough action. They contended he should be satisfied.

The amphibian plane was designed to be what few combination land-water planes were, a craft that had the speed to cope with Zero and Messerschmitt fighters. Because of the need for such ships, the design already was in production. Doc was using the craft whenever possible, and using it as roughly as possible, in order to iron out bugs and add fine points as they occurred to him.

As soon as he was in the air, he contacted Renny Renwick by radio. They had a short-wave length which they normally used.

Doc spoke Mayan, and Renny replied in the same tongue. Mayan was the language they had learned on one of their earliest adventures, the language of the ancient Central American civilization of Maya, and they used it when they did not wish to be understood.

(This Mayan adventure was “The Man of Bronze,” the first of the book-length Doc Savage novels, of which more than one hundred and twenty have now been published.)

In Mayan, Renny said, “We are in the air now. Those men took off in the two seaplanes. Monk and Ham landed in their ship and picked me up.”

“You are following the two seaplanes?”

“Yes.”

“Where are they heading?”

“Straight out to sea, a little to the south,” Renny explained. “That is, they took care to miss the defense area around Norfolk.”

“Report again in an hour.”

“O. K.”

“Beam the report,” Doc said.

“Right,” Renny agreed. “Where do you want it shot at?”

Doc consulted the Atlantic Coast chart. “At Georgetown, South Carolina,” he said.

The business of beaming radio signals in any direction from a plane was another one of Doc's experimental projects. The directional transmission of radio signals was certainly not new, but effective directional transmission from a plane was something else. The device on which Doc was working, once he got it stabilized, would shoot a thin, pencil-like beam in one direction only, greatly facilitating the matter of war planes conversing without the enemy overhearing.

Doc now put his plane in top speed. This was around four hundred miles an hour.

He exchanged the Atlantic Coast chart for a large-scale map of the Caribbean, one which included the Bahama Islands group north to and including Great Abaco, which was shaped somewhat like a deformed Scotty dog, and its detached pup, Little Abaco.

Stony Smith came and looked over Doc's shoulder.

“Why, faith, you're heading for Geography Cay,” he said.

Then he frowned at Doc.

“Or would it be my island, Happy Bones, you chose for a destination?” he asked suspiciously.

“Neither just now.” Doc put a finger on Little Abaco. “Here.”

He did not give reasons. But, when they were a little south of Georgetown, South Carolina, and had picked up Renny's radio report that the planes they were trailing were heading south slightly east toward Little Abaco, Doc set an immediate course for the Abaco group.

THE following is a note from the West Indies *Pilot*, the “bible” of the Bahama Islands group:

There are several channels between the cays. But as they are very intricate and foul, no directions can be given for them; the eye must be the guide.

Doc Savage put the plane down carefully, watching the water, which was so clear that it was deceptive. He taxied toward a small knoll of white sand on which there were a few mangroves and *lignum vitae*, and one building, a long wooden structure.

“I fail to understand this,” said Stony Smith. “Both Geography Cay and Happy Bones Island are still hundreds of miles to the south. Why land here?”

Doc Savage indicated the wooden building on the cay.

“Emergency gasoline store,” he said.

Stony Smith shook his head. “I still fail to—”

“Those two seaplanes,” Doc said, “do not carry enough fuel to make a non-stop flight from Washington to either Happy Bones Island or Geography Cay. But if they could stop here and refuel, they could make it.”

“Oh, you mean they may buy gasoline—”

“Not buy gasoline,” Doc corrected. “This is not an aërial filling station. The gasoline is here for use of the army, navy and the Civilian Air Patrol, in case of emergency. There is an observer stationed here with a radio outfit.”

“If there is a radio here,” said Stony Smith, “those fellows won't be showing up.”

“They might plan to smash the radio and dispose of the observer.”

Stony Smith thought it over. “Verily, it does not seem logical.”

Doc made no comment. As a matter of fact, this was the only spot where the two seaplanes could get gasoline without trouble. If they could land and dispose of the attendant before he used the radio, the problem would be simply solved.

There was also the fact that this gasoline dump was well-known. It was no military secret, since it was just an emergency gasoline supply. There was both aviation gas and boat fuel, and civilian pilots with the necessary permission to fly the area were informed of the place, and it was shown on the airmen's charts

obtainable by any accredited flier.

The water was very flat. Doc beached the plane gently.

The attendant came down to meet them. He was a lanky, sunburned man wearing faded khaki shorts and canvas sneakers. He was not armed.

“Hi,” he said. “I hope you guys have got some reading material you can donate. This place gets lonesome as hell.”

Doc told Johnny, “Take off. Fly west to Grand Bahama Island, pick a good place and land. Settlement Point should be a nice spot. Wait for Monk and Ham and Renny to show up in the other plane, then join them and help them trail the two seaplanes south. Or, if something goes wrong, pick me up. I will have a portable radio.”

Johnny looked startled. But he did' not ask questions.

## Chapter VIII. HELL ALOFT

THE attendant in charge of the gasoline dump on the little cay looked on as Doc shoved the plane off the beach. Johnny gunned the craft around, then took it into the air, and the ship went off into the west like a noisy missile.

The attendant did not act suspicious.

But suddenly he stubbed his toe and did a good job of pretending to fall. He came erect holding a submachine gun which had been covered with paper and a sprinkling of sand.

“Neighbor, this don't look right to me,” he said.

Doc Savage said, “In my hip pocket are some credentials that will show who I am. Do you want to get them, or shall I?”

The attendant watched him closely. “Go ahead,” he said.

The document was official enough to convince the man. “O. K., Mr. Savage,” he said. “I've got a brother in the navy, and he told me about hearing you lecture on aerial fighting tactics. What goes on?”

“A man named Major Lowell, who has an important post in the war effort, has been kidnaped,” Doc said. “The kidnapers are in two seaplanes heading in this direction. They will be badly in need of fuel about the time they get here. It is possible they will land and get gasoline by force.”

“Force, eh?” The attendant grinned with no humor. “I got some force myself. I been itching for some action.”

“On the contrary,” Doc told him, “the two seaplanes will be permitted to refuel.”

“Yeah? Well, you could have just told me that. I can follow orders.”

“I want to get aboard one of the planes,” Doc said.

“They'll think you're a friend, you mean?”

“No.”

“Then,” said the attendant, “you must mean you plan to get aboard without them knowing.”

“That is the idea.”

The other shook his head. “Some idea!” The attendant waved at the cay. “You can stand anywhere on this island and see a grasshopper jump anywhere else on it, if there was a grasshopper. Makes your job a little tough, doesn't it?”

“Possibly not, if you co-operate.”

“Felix is my middle name,” the attendant said. “That is an old Hibernian word meaning co-operate.”

THE two seaplanes appeared about three hours later. They came in from the west, having circled out in that direction to approach the island without attracting as much suspicion. The Florida coast lay to the west.

Flying in close formation that gave them the manner of naval ships, they did not circle, but came down in long glides and landed, the hulls knocking up spray. They nosed into the slight breeze with very little momentum, and planted the float keels on the beach.

They cut the motors.

Hull hatches were thrown back, and men stood looking at the wooden building which was the only structure on the cay.

“Ahoy the building!” one of the men bellowed. “Is this the gasoline dump?”

The attendant appeared around the corner of the shack. He still wore his khaki shorts and sneakers, nothing else.

The breeze, what there was of it, blew from him to the plane, and carried his words.

“That's right,” he called. “Who are you guys?”

“Have you got any aviation gas?”

“Sure.”

“All right, we want to refuel. Our tanks are empty.”

The attendant did not answer at once.

“Give the password,” he shouted then.

There was silence. “Password, hell!” said one of the men in the planes. “We haven't got it. We've got to have gas—”

“Brother, give the password,” yelled the attendant. “Or don't set foot ashore.”

The man on the plane yelled, “Oh, nuts! I'll show you our papers and—”

The attendant made a lunge, scooped up his machine gun from where it had been concealed nearby. He fired a short burst. The bullets hit the water near the planes, knocked up a procession of small geysers.

That started a commotion in the planes. They began sticking rifle barrels out of the windows.

The attendant headed for cover. He did not go into the shack, but went across the sand, going so fast that he seemed to have wings.

He got out of sight behind a pile of metal drums.

The rifle muzzles in the plane windows began letting out fire and noise.

Sand jumped up in many places around the pile of fuel drums, and bullets hitting the drums made hard, ironlike spanking noises.

The attendant's light machine gun let out four brief bursts, about six shots to the burst, but the bullets seemed to accomplish nothing but knock up more water.

Suddenly fire sheeted over the fuel drums. But in a moment there was more smoke than fire. Infinitely more smoke, the very black product of fuel oil, burning.

"Damn the luck!" yelled a voice in one of the planes. "The muzzle blast from his machine gun set the oil on fire!"

THE smoke crawled out of the oil drums as black as a polecat and became in size a cow, an elephant, a house. It rolled and tumbled and stuck close together the way oil smoke seems to stick.

In the smoke, the attendant's machine gun gobbled indignantly a time or two.

The breeze took the smoke and carried it toward the planes. The smoke kept close to the ground, spreading more to the sides than up and down, it seemed. It reached the seaplanes and enveloped them.

There was profanity and disorganization around the planes for a few moments. Then a man got the crews organized.

"Scatter and rush that pile of oil drums," the organizer shouted.

They did that. They piled out of the two beached seaplanes, yelling the way men like to yell when they are going into danger in a group.

They shot into the oil drums and the smoke and the sand and the bright Caribbean sky.

The echoes, and there were echoes although there seemed to be nothing from which echoes could bounce, whooped and gobbled. A horde of sea birds, gulls and pelicans with sacklike chins, were in the air like leaves in a whirlwind, making outcries.

"Careful," roared the spokesman for the group from the two seaplanes.

They held their guns ready and alert, and rounded the pile of oil drums.

There was nobody there. No attendant.

They thought for a while that he had in some fashion dodged around and hidden in the smoke. But before they could investigate that possibility, one yelled and pointed, "There he is! The motorboat! There he goes!"

They should have heard the motorboat. They could hear it now. And they could see the gasoline dump attendant, standing erect in the boat, steering with his knee, and drawing a bead on them with the little submachine gun. He fired, and the bullets made ugly, hard-footed running sounds in the sand around the men.

The attendant got down out of sight in the launch. The launch picked up its nose, dug its stern into the water and drew a streak of foam across the clear blue water.

There was some shooting, but the men did not stop the launch.

“All right, get the high-test gas in the plane,” the leader said.

By that time, Doc Savage was safely concealed in one of their seaplanes.

THE trick had worked very well, as well as Doc and the attendant had hoped when they rigged it.

There had been two possible holes in the scheme. First, the planes might not beach in the right spot when they came in; but this chance had been negligible, because actually there was only one good spot for beaching the ships close to the gasoline shack. Doc and the attendant had rolled a few coral rocks on the beach in the edge of the water at other points, to make everywhere else look even less desirable.

Second, they might have left a man with each of the planes. But they hadn't. There had been too much excitement.

Doc had been concealed under the sand. First, he had dug a hole in the sand, then the attendant had put stout brown wrapping paper over him, and sand over that to a depth of a couple of inches, leaving a hole for breathing.

It was perfect camouflage and Doc had been close to the edge of the water, near the planes, and in the path the smoke from the burning fuel oil drums was sure to take.

The attendant had only to draw attention, start the shooting, fire the fuel oil drums, and escape. Under cover of the smoke, Doc simply climbed into one of the planes.

He had only one piece of bad luck.

Major Lowell was not in the plane into which he clambered.

He took a little time to make sure, and then he jumped out of the ship, but had to climb back in again, for the wind shifted and the smoke moved away from the craft, so that it was not safe to make a dash for the other plane.

In a seaplane of this type, one with a deep hull, there was baggage stowage space under the floor boards, a long compartment which was large enough to hold him.

He pulled up one of the flimsy but strong hatches of aluminum alloy, found the spot loaded with food and boxes that were not labeled, and tried another hatch. There was space under that one.

He inserted himself in the cavity and closed the hatch.

The radio which he had brought along, a more or less standard walkie-talkie, except that it was very compact, he wedged in beside him. Now was a good time to talk, so he switched it on.

He got Johnny Littlejohn, and said, "I am aboard one of their planes. I will switch on this radio outfit each twenty minutes and leave it on for thirty seconds, so you can get a radio-compass bearing on the signal. You can follow us in that fashion."

*"I'll be superamalgamated!"*

Johnny said. *"What about Monk and Ham and Renny, in the other plane?"*

"Contact them," Doc said, "by radio. Tell them what I've just told you—"

*"Won't be necessary, Doc,"*

Renny's bull-throated voice interrupted. *"We're receiving you, Doc."*

"Good!"

*"Any idea what it is all about?"*

Renny asked.

"Not yet, except that it obviously involves either Happy Bones Island or Geography Cay."

*"Have they got Major Lowell aboard, or have they killed him and tossed his body overboard?"*

"Not sure yet," Doc admitted.

He was sure a moment later, though. He heard men outside, and lay very still and quiet, switching off the transmitter and receiver of his tiny radio combination.

In the other seaplane, someone cursed loudly, and there was a commotion.

"What's wrong?" somebody demanded.

"Major Lowell was sawing against a sharp metal edge," a man yelled, "and had his hands loose."

"Rap him on the head and put him to sleep for a while," the other said. "That'll teach him to pull such stuff."

Evidently they did that.

Then they refueled the planes and took off.

Evidently they circled with the hope of shooting the attendant in the launch. But Doc had taken care of that possibility in his plan. Nearby there was a smaller island with a great deal of mangrove growth, an impenetrable tangle where the attendant would be safe.

He was obviously quite safe, because there was not even any shooting.

## **Chapter IX. HAPPY BONES**

DOC SAVAGE knew that safety, or the feeling of safety, can be as soothing as a drug. He had seen it demonstrated more than once in the case of individuals. It was not alone a failing of individuals, but it could be national, as in the case of the United States caught napping at Pearl Harbor. So he should not have been feeling as safe as he was feeling after they had been in the air several hours.

He was taken completely by surprise. It amounted to that. Such a thing did not happen to him often, and his first emotion when it did happen was one of shame.

The long monotonous flight had not dulled him or lulled him, because he had the physical stamina to cope with a great deal more than had happened so far. He should have been alert. There was no excuse. He should have been expecting something to happen, and particularly he should have been on the alert for the unexpected. But he was not. He was not even alert.

He was lying on his back in the baggage space under the floor of the plane, and he was wide awake. Being awake made it doubly embarrassing for him, although it should not have been much different if he had been asleep. He had developed—or, rather, he had been taught by an old Ubangi hunter in the Dar El Kuti, upper Belgian Congo—the facility of sleeping and yet being awake.

The Ubangi had lived to be a very old hunter because he had that facility; the Ubangi was going on ninety years old; whereas the average life span of men in his tribe and trade was not much more than twenty-four years. The surprising thing about the facility of sleeping in this fashion was that it refreshed you, after you mastered it, the same as ordinary sound slumber. It was psychology more than a physical art, and Doc had always owned to a sneaking suspicion that the old man of the jungle was a little bit of a psychic doctor himself, or he could not have imparted the art as he had.

The totally unexpected always had a strange effect on Doc Savage. He hoped that was because he planned so carefully, because he tried to foresee everything and overlook nothing, and long practice and grueling attention to the business of being safe at all times had made him rather expert at seeing trouble ahead.

The unexpected always jarred him, made him wonder if some mental ability had slipped down a notch, made him wonder if he was over a peak and becoming less efficient. He preferred to call the feeling wonder, but some of it might be plain, unadulterated fear.

If he became a man who was careless without being able to help it, when he was not wanting to be careless, it would be as bad as an incurable disease. It would be fatal. Quite fatal and probably not long about it. Carelessness would not go together with his strange career, the career of righting wrongs and punishing evildoers in the far corners of the earth. Or pursuing adventure. The pursuit of adventure was doubtless a better description of it.

Not as romantic, of course, the plain designation of adventurer. But it might amount to that. There was no denying that pure love of adventure was at the bottom of much of his career. And surely it was the thing that held his five aides to him so inseparably. They were also held together by friendship and mutual admiration, but those things were not the real glue. Those things were the ingredients of peace and quiet, whereas the thing that made this organization was more dynamic, volatile, explosive, breathless. It was a liking for adventure that was never fully satisfied.

Anyway, when they opened the hatch, he was taken by surprise.

AND what was more, the two men who had opened the hatch got over their astonishment before Doc recovered. They fell upon him. If he had been less man, they would have had him then. They should have held him and someone else would have shot him, or fell on him with a knife.

As it was, Doc began trying to get up.

He put one foot under him and shoved to get up. The foot was against the hull skin of the plane. The skin split, his one foot went through.

The two men who had hold of him were bellowing. Drawn by their outcry, two more men fell upon them

and tried to help.

The added weight split the hull skin more and Doc went through with both legs, down to his waist. From his hips down, his body was out in space.

“Bring a rifle!” a foe shrieked. “A rifle! Hurry, damn it!”

They should have devoted themselves to pushing him through the hole into space. They could have done that.

Instead, they brought a rifle. It was a good automatic rifle, American. A stout piece. Built to take a bayonet and stand up under much use.

The roaring rush of wind from the propellers and from the fast passage of the plane through the air battered Doc's legs about and pulled at them with force.

They shoved the rifle muzzle down at him just as he had one hand free. So he got the rifle muzzle. He pushed it to one side, and the holder yanked the trigger rapidly. One bullet went into a man's foot, and the rest through the plane hull into space.

Doc got the gun and jammed it across the struts. It made a bridge, something to hold to, something to keep him from being forced out into space.

They fought then for a while in what was really silence, although there were tearing sounds of cloth and other tearing sounds that were like muscles rending, and gasping and breathing that was like sheets of sandpaper rubbed together. There were no words, nothing but straining force. But Doc Savage got the rifle barrel fixed across the struts, and slowly he climbed upon it, bearing up against the weight of the men above.

They fought to hold him, and when they lost their grip and he got loose, it was as sudden as a dam breaking. He was up into the cabin, and free.

They had loaded spare gasoline into the plane cabin in five-gallon cans, lashing the cans in place, wedging them in a high wall across the rear of the plane cabin.

Doc went to the cans. He hit one with his fist. It was fat and full, and it split at one seam like a fat man laughing. The high-test gas sheeted out.

Doc tore that can loose and hurled it down the cabin aisle. It bounced off seats, turned and skipped and hopped. Wet gasoline flew up on the walls and ceiling. Gas fumes filled the cabin.

“If you shoot,” Doc shouted, “the flash of your guns will set the gasoline on fire. Blow us to pieces!”

A LOT depended on them getting the idea of gun flash and the gas fumes. They had to get the idea quickly. Doc hoped they would, thought it reasonable, because fresh in their minds would be the matter of the flash of the rifle of the attendant at the gas dump, on the island, lighting the fuel oil leaking from the fuel drums.

The truth was that the fuel oil back there on the island had not been ignited by a gun flash. The muzzle flash from a firearm would not as a rule ignite modern fuel oil. A match had started that fire, but they had not seen the match.

As was the practice of the manufacturer when building this particular type of seaplane for civilian use, there was a partition, a dividing bulkhead, between the cabin and the smaller compartment where pilot and copilot-navigator sat.

A man now got an idea.

“Close that door!” he screamed. “Close the door of the control department!”

They did not understand what he meant. Either that, or they did not act soon enough to suit the man who had the idea. He started plunging forward to close the door himself.

Doc burst another gasoline tin with his fist, got the tin free, and threw it. He made a good throw. The five-gallon gas tin hit squarely in the control compartment.

A center bracket between the two seats held the throttles, and other controls. The tin impaled itself on this, on the throttles. Gasoline splashed the pilot, soaked him from the waist down. He half stood up. His face was horrified, for a moment as distorted as the face of a gargoyle. He knew the high-test gas fumes would explode.

A two-hundred-pound bomb would not take the plane apart more thoroughly than the gas fumes, if a spark got to them.

“Don't shoot!” he screeched. “Don't shoot! Don't shoot! Don't shoot!”

All through the violence that followed, he screamed the same two words over and over in a continuous screeching, seeming never to stop to take a breath.

The gas tin hitting the throttles had jammed one wide open and one shut. For practical purposes, the plane now had one wide-open motor and one dead one. It was not a ship which flew well under such a condition. It would fly, but it took the babying of a good pilot.

This pilot was not in a state of mind to baby anything.

The plane did a little waltzing. Alarmed, the pilot yanked and pounded at the wedged gasoline can. The plane nosed up, up, up, as he was preoccupied. The ship went into the peak of a power stall.

All that was necessary now was for the pilot to push the stick forward to get the nose of the plane down, get flying speed. But he was excited. He put his feet down hard on the rudders to hold them steady, and one foot slipped off. The result was that the pressure on the other pedal put on hard right rudder at the stalling point, or a moment before.

The big plane snap-rolled.

The snap-roll was not a complete one. The ship did not go over and recover. It got its belly to the sky and stayed there, as the pilot tramped on the rudder pedal he had lost and steadied the stick.

Then the pilot fell out of the seat on his head, for the safety belt had not been fastened. He hit hard and headfirst on what was normally the roof of the pilot compartment, a roof made of transparent plastic set in a metal framing. The plastic split and let him through to his shoulders and he hung there, more scared than he had ever been before in his life.

THE big plane was not built for flying upside down. That is, its characteristics were such that it would not

maintain itself in flight in that position.

Doc Savage was now crouched on the ceiling of the plane, which for the moment had become the floor.

What had been the cabin floor was composed mostly of hatches covering the storage space in the hull below. These were carelessly fastened, or not fastened at all. They came open, and the storage space contents sprayed the cabin, fell on the tumbled litter of men on the floor.

Out of the storage space had come suitcases, packages, two cases of liquor—paper-wrapped bottles of liquor. Some of the liquor broke and added its smell to the gas fumes and its glass fragments to the general danger. There was a portable radio, rifles, revolvers, cartridges, a bundle of machetes, clothing, cameras, binoculars, a portable typewriter and parachutes. At least a dozen parachutes, all new and all neatly wrapped and sacked, still with the factory labels: *Bird Parachute Co.*

There was no shooting.

There was not even much fighting.

Because now the big plane balked up into the sky and did a stall, and fell off into the natural result, which was a tight tailspin, harmless, but confusing.

It was like piling all the assorted objects that were now loose in the plane into a tin can, and then shaking the can and turning it around rapidly.

Doc got into the parachute straps, hanging to a cabin seat. It was a good feeling to snap the last buckle, the chest buckle. It was like finding a nightmare was just a nightmare.

Doc looked out of the cabin windows. His primary interest now was what was below.

It wasn't water, and that was a great relief.

The pilot neutralized his controls and the big plane came out of the spin. The pilot immediately looked back over his shoulder, much interested in the mess in the cabin. He looked back almost too long, so that the ship was in a screaming dangerous dive.

He had the sense to get the stick back slowly, wisely. The plane has not yet been built which cannot be flown loose from its wings in such a maneuver.

Doc got a small grenade out of his clothing. He held it up menacingly, and made his voice big and threatening.

“Get the parachutes on!” he shouted. “I am going to set the plane afire!”

THEY did not for a moment doubt his intentions. That was good, because he meant what he said.

There was an island below. He wanted everybody down there. On the ground, he could hunt them down one at a time.

It was too much to expect the plane to stay up indefinitely without it occurring to somebody that they could get rid of the gasoline fumes simply by knocking out the cabin windows, or opening them. Ten or fifteen seconds with the windows open, and shooting would be safe in the cabin.

They fought for parachutes. There were enough of them to go around, a couple to spare. But they made

a fighting mess of distributing them.

Two men were unconscious, and nobody paid attention to them.

Doc said, "Put parachutes on the unconscious men."

They did that, watching the grenade in his hand as if it was a horned devil.

Doc indicated a burlap-covered coil of rope, rather small, which had been in the stuff stored under the floor.

"Cut two lengths of rope," he ordered. "Tie one end to the ripcord rings of their parachutes. Tie the other ends to a seat bracket in the plane."

They did so.

"Now," Doc said, "open the hatch and push them out."

Out went the two unconscious men.

Into the plane cabin through the open hatch, air came roaring.

"Hell, hell, hell!" a man bawled, suddenly. "We're dumb! Hell, we're dumb! Smash the windows! The wind will blow the gas out."

Doc tossed his grenade into the gasoline. It was a flash-grenade, a rare type which was more or less experimental. The idea was that it made light, incredible quantities of light that did the optical organs no good. It was something like looking at a welding arc. For a minute after it, if you looked at it squarely, you were thoroughly blinded.

It took a great deal of heat to make such a light. The flash ignited the gasoline. With a great sound, a big laugh that did not quite come off, the rear of the cabin was full of flame. Then the whole cabin filled.

Doc went out into space, feeling for the parachute rip-cord ring.

## **Chapter X. GLOOM ON HAPPY BONES**

THE plane was not high when he jumped, not over three thousand feet. So he hauled the rip cord out of its slide immediately, and the parachute bloomed without mishap. He had made many 'chute jumps, and none of them had ever been a casual matter. The nervous perspiration on his forehead felt cold in the rushing air.

He looked down and found that the island below was about two miles long and nowhere more than a mile wide. It looked to be, at one point, almost a mile high, but that was improbable.

But the highest point of the island, the cone of the volcano which had formed it, was all of three thousand, for it was already level with his descending parachute. An island of that size, with that height, looked strange.

It was strange as a stone thumb sticking up out of the wonderfully blue Caribbean Sea, a thumb hairy with green jungle except where the naked stone showed like bare, calloused spots.

Overhead, the burning plane was spilling black smoke and men and parachutes as it boomed through the

sky.

The other seaplane was buzzing along above it like a mate-bird that was worried, but helpless over its companion.

The presence of a third plane surprised Doc, caught his instant interest. Monk, Renny, Ham, or Johnny and Stony Smith—he thought instantly. But that was wrong. They would have a plane he would recognize. This was not one of their ships.

This was a two-motored cabin seaplane, civilian, rather crisp and new-looking in the brilliant, tropical sunlight.

It dawned on Doc that he had seen the plane before. But that had been at night, at a Washington airport. It was Hannah's plane—the ship in which she had flown southward from Washington.

Hannah nosed her big plane down in the sky for speed. She headed close to the blazing plane, arced past it, came past the parachutes, still diving, past Doc.

It was Hannah, all right. He saw her watching him, saw her arm jump up in a quick gesture intended to show him that she recognized him.

AFTER this, Doc had no time for anything but maneuvering the parachute. The menace of fanged stone and sheer cliffs was threatening him.

The theory of parachute manipulation, when put into words, is simple enough to be a little insulting. You merely pull down the shrouds on one side, spilling air from the other side, and causing the 'chute to slide through the sky. Putting the thing in practice can be aggravating, however, and if care is not exercised, something to stand the hair on end. Particularly when the 'chutist is close to the ground.

Doc tried furiously to reach the rim of a sheer cliff that dropped suddenly, from a height of three or four hundred feet, into the sea.

He didn't make it. Trees overhung the cliff edge. He smashed through those, missed the cliff by a dozen feet, and fell rapidly.

He was free of the 'chute harness. He had gotten out of that, hoping to get hold of a solid tree limb projecting from the cliff, if possible. He hung with an arm hooked through the parachute harness.

The 'chute caught on the boughs. It ripped, had a hole torn in it the size of a tall man. It fell faster, nearly a hundred feet, then blew against a snag and hung.

The snag projected about a dozen feet from the cliff face. It was a gnarled tree, *lignum vitae*, the tree with wood so tough that pulley blocks are made from it that are better than metal. It had grown out from the cranny in the cliff face, died, turned white with age.

Doc looked at it, at the cliff face.

There was no way, absolutely no way of climbing up or down the cliff from the snag.

It was about a hundred-foot drop to the foot of the cliff.

THERE was a breeze of wind, a fresh, brisk sweep of the trade wind that swept this part of the Caribbean. It puffed and billowed the parachute folds, made them like a blooming, changing white flower.

Doc looked downward thoughtfully. The sea was against the foot of the cliff. Apparently he could drop, and land in it, and the water obviously was deep. But he knew that any kind of a judgment from height was deceptive. He might drop and hit halfway down the cliff slope and be killed.

Out to sea, there was a smacking sound. The burning plane had hit. The trail of smoke it had left was from sky to sea like an irregular, dark snake. White spray knocked up by the ship subsided slowly, and there was one wing sticking up like a shark fin. The wing rolled and disappeared.

Some of the parachuting plane crew were already down in the sea. Others were close to the water. All would land in the sea.

The surviving seaplane was circling slowly, as if dazed.

Hannah had banked back sharply, was flying past the cliff face. She waved at Doc. He waved back.

The heaviest object in Doc's pockets was a smoke grenade, his only one. He compared its weight with the rip-cord ring and cable, which he still retained. The ring and cable was heavier.

He dropped cable and ring, watched it fall. It hit at the edge of the cliff, hardly in the water.

Cold sweat came out on Doc again. If he had dropped, and it certainly looked safe enough to drop, he would have hit solid stone a hundred feet down.

He began to swing, like a pendulum, his body in toward the cliff, then out. He did it carefully, watching the parachute to make sure it was not tearing free of the snag. It held. The silk was good.

Finally his feet touched the cliff face, and he could give himself more momentum. The next time in against the cliff, he gave the backswing everything he had. At the far end of the outswing, he let go and hurtled toward the sea.

All through the hundred-foot drop, he fought to keep his body falling feet-first. And at the bottom, he tensed himself and protected the back of his head and his nostrils with his arms.

(A hundred-foot dive is not fabulous. Probably everyone who reads this has seen circus high divers perform, and there have been high divers who worked regularly from a height of more than a hundred feet.)

The water seemed almost solid when he hit it. But nothing broke, or even hurt very bad.

Hannah, bringing her plane in for a landing, was the first thing he saw when he got to the surface. She landed expertly, on a sea that was not very rough, and taxied in toward him.

She yanked open a hatch, called, "Are you hurt? Get aboard."

Doc swam to her plane, caught a handling cleat, swung up and into the cabin.

"You turn up in unexpected places," Hannah said. "I wasn't expecting you." She gestured at the cliff. "Where'd you get the practice, in a circus?"

Doc looked upward. The seaplane was diving for them.

“Get this thing in the air,” he said. “They are going to try to machine gun us.”

THE very first bullet fired by the diving seaplane must have stopped their motor. Anyway, they heard no lead hit the plane before the motor stopped. It was the port motor.

Hannah was not unduly excited.

“Bless their lucky souls,” she said.

Bullets were hitting the plane.

“Cross your fingers,” Hannah added.

Doc seized her. He picked her up bodily, hauled her out of the pilot seat, back into the cabin. As far back in the cabin as he could get.

A lot of bullets, three or four hundred, went through the pilot compartment where the girl had been. The other motor stopped. Some of the bullets were incendiaries. The wing fuel tank took fire.

The other seaplane, all flaps set, moaned past very slowly, not more than fifty feet above them.

“Into the water,” Doc said.

The water felt hot. Almost scalding hot. That was probably due to the nervous condition of their bodies.

Doc kept hold of Hannah until he saw that she was an expert swimmer.

Hannah said, “The south end of the cliff seems nearer.”

“That is right,” Doc agreed, and they swam.

The seaplane circled back. They did not let it get too close before they dived. For a while, the drumming of bullets on the water was hard on their eardrums.

On top again, they swam hard. A few rifle shots were fired at them from the seaplane as it circled frantically to get at them again. They ignored those, then dived as the craft got close enough for the machine guns, 45-caliber weapons, to start emptying.

THEY got ashore during the next breather. There was a beach of dark coral sand, big volcanic boulders, and jungle. They ran and climbed for a while.

The seaplane landed on the sea and began picking up the parachutists.

“The luck of Happy Bones,” Hannah said, as if the statement should mean something.

Doc asked, “What do you mean?”

“The reputation of the place,” she told him. “A legend that has been the heritage of Happy Bones Island for at least two centuries. A legend that says only the evil are lucky here. They say that Happy Bones is the devil’s own and that he looks after his own while they are here.”

“This is Happy Bones, then?”

She glanced at Doc Savage. She smiled ruefully. "Look, I know what you are thinking. Why don't you say it? Why don't you say, what are you doing here, skunk? Go ahead!"

"You took off from Washington with sparks and brimstone," Doc said.

"And now I've got repentance. That's right." She sighed. "Do you ever hit people in the eye for being fools? If so, I offer an eye. Go ahead and swat me."

"What changed your notions?" Doc inquired, curiously.

"Thought," she said. "Thought is great stuff, if you get around to it in the right places. That's my trouble. I never indulge in any in the right places."

The plane had picked up four men and was after the others.

"You decided," said Doc, "that I was not a crook."

"I don't know whether you are a crook and I might not care," Hannah told him. "The point is, I decided you were not out to hang a shandy on me."

"That is a strange viewpoint."

"The crook part? Me not caring whether you're a crook? Oh, I didn't mean that literally." She shrugged. "A crook is a comparative state. Depends on how you think. All of my ancestors have been pirates, and they thought pirates were O. K. O. K., but you had to watch them."

"I see."

"No," she said. "No, you don't. And don't start bothering me. Don't get me to thinking about it."

"Why not?"

"Because," she said, "it worries me. It gets me to wondering if I'm normal like other people. I haven't had a normal upbringing, and I know that makes me a funny kind of goat. But I don't like to think I'm crazy, or something."

Doc's face was expressionless, to hide a grin. He rather liked the girl, which was a little surprising, because usually he was scared of them for one reason or another.

"All right," he said. "It was nice of you to land and try to rescue me."

"It was nice of you to haul me out of the pilot's seat before the machine-gun bullets got there," she said. "Now that we've scratched each other's backs over the mutual life-saving, I will answer the question you asked awhile ago."

"What question?"

"Yes, this is Happy Bones Island."

THEY climbed for a while. The going was steep, very rough. The boulders were enormous, the jungle remarkably thick.

The lava formation, Doc noted, was unusual. He was something of a geologist expert. His knowledge of

the field probably was not as specialized as that of the gaunt, big-worded Johnny Littlejohn, but it was fully as broad. The lava was not all the conventional type. Some of it was; even the greater part was. But there were unusual characteristics. He was interested.

“Unique formations,” he remarked.

“Made for unique people,” Hannah said. “You should see the little caves all over the place.”

“Unusual?”

“Supposed to be. I've heard about them. The pirate Smiths used them in the old days. Occasionally, a government would send an expedition to get revenge for ships they had looted. When the worm turned on them, the Smiths would hide out.”

“But you have not seen much of the island?”

“This,” said Hannah, “is the first time I have ever been here. But I have flown over the island. The last time, they shot at me!”

“With rifles?”

Hannah laughed grimly.

“With a rifle,” she said, “that fired a bullet about three inches thick.”

“Antiaircraft? What were they doing with antiaircraft guns on the island?”

“They just had one.” Hannah did not think it was unusual, apparently. “Stony Smith is liable to have anything unusual. If he thought he wanted an antiaircraft gun to play with, he'd buy one. And to see how it worked, he'd probably take pot shots at the first plane that came past.”

They came to a point from which the water was visible through the jungle. Hannah's plane had burned almost to the water now, not sinking, but burning like a boat. It would go down shortly.

“Thirty-six thousand dollars,” she said. “And secondhand, at that.”

“The plane?”

“Yes. It was almost new, though. Millionaire got it, then got mad because the government wouldn't let him fly around wherever he wanted to. I paid thirty-six thousand. It cost him about seventy.”

They climbed some more.

The seaplane had about finished the job of picking up the parachutists.

Hannah looked all around, listened. “Strange,” she remarked, “that no Smiths have shown up. They are thicker than fleas on Happy Bones.”

“What Smiths?” asked Doc.

“The black ones.”

Doc showed by his expression that he did not understand.

“The natives of the island are black. Slave descendants. Their parents were brought from Africa, or stolen from ships on which they were being brought from Africa, long ago. As far as I know, the only

white resident on the island is Stony Smith.”

“You think they should be around by now?”

“Of course,” She nodded vehemently. “The black men on these islands are the most curious people in the world. They would have rushed over here to investigate.”

“Is there a village?”

She nodded. “On the other side of the island. But they have had time to get to us.”

Doc made no comment.

“It's very strange,” Hannah insisted.

THE seaplane now finished its rescue work. The last parachutist was hauled aboard. After that, the plane sat for a while on the sea. They were probably having a conference inside.

“I'll tell you why I was flying around here when this thing started,” Hannah said. “It was because I am convinced that Stony Smith is at the bottom of the mystery.”

They watched the seaplane start moving. Blasting noise of its motors came to their ears. The craft gathered speed, began hitting the tops of waves, finally bounced into the air.

“Now they'll come back and try to machine gun us,” Hannah said. “When that fails, they'll get the blacks on our trail.”

But the plane kept going. It bored into the west. It climbed a little, but not much, as if it did not have far to go and was wasting no time getting there.

It did not come back. It was still going into the west when sight and sound of it were finally lost.

Doc Savage looked at Hannah.

“What island,” he asked, “lies to the west?”

She stared at him as if the answer was going to make her ill.

“Geography Cay,” she said.

“Your island?”

“Yes.”

“Do you,” Doc asked, “have the slightest idea of what this is all about?”

“No.”

“You say,” Doc persisted, “that you did some thinking on the flight down from Washington?”

“Yes.”

“Did you happen to think of what the green parrot and its nest could mean?”

She shook her head mutely. She did not look as if she had words.

## Chapter XI. ERROR, NOT SLIGHT

COLONEL JOHN—RENNY—RENEWICK was a very large man, but no one ever noticed his size because of three other freaks about his appearance. First, he had a perpetually long and sad face, a face invariably wearing the expression of a man who was about to attend the funeral of a good friend. Second was his fists, which would hardly go in gallon pails. And third, his voice, which was something titanic. It was a voice that had been known to startle an auditorium filled with engineers who were used to loud noises. Renny was in best voice as he bellowed into the radio microphone, "What's gone wrong? Why aren't we hearing any word from Doc?"

Ham put his fingers in his ears, asked, "Why use the radio? Johnny's plane is only a mile away."

Monk also had his fingers in his ears.

The two pets, Habeas Corpus and Chemistry, went under different seats in the plane.

Into the microphone, Renny bellowed, "What— Oh, that was just Ham being what he thinks is smart. What about Doc? I know you said he was going to hide in one of the seaplanes of this gang."

In the other plane, Johnny Littlejohn was uncomfortable. He told Renny over the radio, "*Well, something maybe went wrong.*"

"This is a hell of a time for something to go wrong! Holy cow!"

*"The reason I called you,"*

said Johnny, *"is the gas."*

"You about out, too?"

*"No, but we can't fly around forever on what we've got."*

Over the radio from the other plane, Renny made rumbling noises that meant discontent. "What do you suggest?"

*"I have an idea."*

"What is it?" Renny demanded. "And look here, use big words. You only use little words on us fellows when you are plenty worried. Little words from you make me uneasy."

The two planes were flying abreast, about a mile apart, altitude thirteen thousand feet. They had gone up to thirteen thousand as a gag, a gesture that might, they said they hoped, result in some word from Doc. There had been none. In all directions the eye could detect nothing but the unnatural blue water of the Caribbean, unreal with the brightness of tropical sunlight. They were feeling silly about the thirteen gag.

Johnny glanced at Stony Smith.

"You think it would be all right," he asked, "to drop in at your island?"

"I sooth, it is pleasant board and bounty I offer you," Stony Smith said, in his best Shakespearian manner. "A genteel tarrying place, regardless of what that vixen Hannah told you."

Johnny consulted the fuel gauges again.

"I'll be superamalgamated!" he said. "We've got to land somewhere."

The microphone had been alive, and Renny Renwick had overheard the conversation. Renny asked, "*Is Stony Smith suggesting we go to Happy Bones Island?*"

"That's right," Johnny said. "He says there is a good house and pleasant food there, and we might as well wait in some degree of comfort until we hear from Doc."

"*Holy cow!*"

Renny boomed. "*What's wrong with that?*"

"Well, nothing that I see. I was just going to put it up to you."

Renny rumbled at Monk and Ham, and Ham's response that, "*Anything to stop you thundering around like this!*" was audible.

"*O. K. The two nitwits say that it's all right with them if we land on Happy Bones.*"

THEY picked up Happy Bones Island about an hour later. A few clouds were now in the sky, and the brilliant sun made the shadows of these dark upon the sea, so that it was hard to distinguish the cloud shadows from an island in the distance.

Monk looked it over.

"Nice, warty place," was his opinion. "Great spot to practice leaping from crag to crag."

"Depend on you to spot anything that looks like home," Ham told him.

"Meaning I'm part goat?"

"Who said anything about just 'part'?" Ham asked.

They had a good loud quarrel over that, and their spirits were improved the way a resounding fuss always helped them.

Happy Bones Island had a harbor which was obviously small but excellent. There was a reef barrier a mile offshore on that side, a reef that was almost half a mile wide, a forest of coral spires, none of which showed more than a few inches above the water. Inside this, the sea was calm.

Johnny informed them over the radio, "*Stony Smith tells me that the harbor is called Sad Bone.*"

Sad Bone Harbor was a cup, small and perfect, blue with good deep water. The beach was an inviting crescent of white sand.

Beyond the beach was the house, or a group of several houses. They were low and of stone, white, solid and thick-looking. A little Moorish in style, and obviously built there for the centuries. The rooftops were colored brightly, reds and greens and tans.

"Behold," said Stony Smith. "A paradise, did I not tell you?"

"Looks all right," Johnny admitted. "Where do you suppose those seaplanes went? What do you imagine

happened to Major Lowell?"

"They would not come here," said Stony Smith with certainty.

Johnny landed first, although there was nothing that particularly required attention, nothing dangerous. The plane made perfect contact with the water, and Johnny then sailed it into the sand beach. Because he had been doing the navigating, he had looked over a nautical almanac and a tide table, and knew there was not much tide here, so little danger of stranding the planes high on the beach. He got out, however, and tossed overside a small anchor as a bit of precaution in case the plane should drift.

Monk and Ham and Renny arrived in the other plane. They beached the ship.

"Hey," Monk called. "Hey, Johnny. Did you notice, over on the other side of the island, in the air, what looked like a trace of smoke?"

"Never noticed it," Johnny admitted.

They walked toward the house, Stony Smith saying proudly, "Come on and see it, friends. Forsooth, you will find a feast for your eyes. You will like it."

The breeze shook the fronds of palms and gulls traveled lazily through the air, going about whatever business gulls have as if it was not very important.

"The smoke," said Monk, "was kind of thin. I'm not sure it was smoke. It is hard to tell when you are flying a plane."

"Maybe it wasn't smoke?"

"Maybe not," Monk admitted. "If it was, it came from something that had burned an hour ago, probably. The smoke cloud had blown out to sea. But, as you say, it maybe wasn't smoke."

Stony Smith waved at the house. "Fitted for a kingly abode, eh?" he said.

"Not bad," Monk admitted.

Then his eyes popped.

"No," he said. "No, I was wrong."

It was a good job of camouflaging someone had done on four tripod-type machine guns. The tripod guns were a large variety of weapon which a modern, mechanized force would have rated as obsolete, but that did not mean they could not kill a man, or a hundred men. The only reason they were obsolete was because they just put out four or five hundred bullets a minute, and the belt feed was not standard.

The camouflaging had been done expertly with bushes and flowers. These were pushed aside, and there were the guns.

The men with rifles, of which there were several, came out of the house and from behind things and two of them materialized in the tops of palm trees.

There were no words for a few seconds.

"Watch it, fellows," Renny rumbled. "They've got us in the barrel."

They stood perfectly still, lifting arms. There was no alternative. Any offensive move would be suicide.

Stony Smith glared at the machine gunners, his neck and face slowly getting red.

“Who are you cads?” he yelled suddenly.

One of the gunners laughed. “Cads,” he said. “What’s a cad?” he asked one of his companions.

“It must be one of them new government departments,” another told him.

A new howl came from Stony Smith.

He was staring at a compound, a wire pen, in a thicket of palm trees behind the house. The pen obviously had been a stock pen of some kind, but lately it had been strengthened and heightened by the addition of more woven wire. This pen was about a hundred feet long and half as wide.

Around the pen, mounted on insulators, there was bare wire that was obviously electrified.

In the pen were several small sheds, formerly stock sheds.

In the pen also were black men, women and children. They looked forlorn and unhappy. They stared at the newcomers, did not say a word.

Stony Smith howled again. He pointed at the pen filled with native prisoners.

“My people!” he screamed. “My natives! My subjects! They’ve got them prisoners!”

## **Chapter XII. THE PARROT'S NEST**

DOC SAVAGE and Hannah listened to Stony Smith howl. They could understand his words. And Hannah turned to Doc with an expression that was dumfounded.

“I don’t get it,” she said. “I thought he was behind it all.”

Doc Savage said nothing. He was breathing heavily. As a matter of fact, he was winded, and very discouraged.

They had been unfortunate. They had failed to reach this spot in time to warn Monk and Ham and Renny and Johnny against landing. The men were ashore, in fact, by the time they had come in sight of the beach.

Hannah said, “Stony Smith didn’t know those men were here.”

Doc made no reply. He studied the surroundings, using his ears and eyes.

He knew that they had been careless getting here. They had raced madly through the jungle in hopes of preventing the planes landing. If there were guards in the jungle, they doubtless would have been heard.

They had been heard, too.

“Quiet,” Doc whispered. “I think we are being surrounded.”

He strained his ears. He got a small, hardwood peg and jammed it in the ground and listened against that, Indian fashion.

“Two parties,” he breathed. “One behind us. The other in front and a little to the right. They have us located, I believe.”

“How many?”

“Eight or ten, altogether.”

“We can lick that many,” Hannah said. She sounded as if she would not consider such a feat extraordinary.

Doc examined the jungle growth overhead. It was quite thick, interlacing. Unusually thick growth for an island, although not extraordinary for the mainland. He moved cautiously to a tree.

“Climb,” he said.

Hannah examined the tree, then frowned at him. She did not think much of the climbing idea. “They’ll have us treed,” she said. “That will make it simple for them.”

“Not too simple,” Doc said. “Climb.”

“I’d better take off my shoes,” she said.

Her feet were well-shaped, firm and tanned. And she could climb silently. Doc went up behind her, watching for the enemy in the jungle. They were somewhere close, he was sure. But the growth was very thick, and he had not yet glimpsed them.

“Higher,” he whispered to Hannah, when she stopped climbing.

She went on, but halted again when they were up about fifty feet.

“Look, I’m no monkey,” she said. “If you want to know the truth, I’m scared. If I have to break my neck, I’d sooner not do it in a fall.”

Doc listened for a while. And finally he located one group of the prowlers. They were crawling through the jungle, five men with cocked rifles.

“Put your arms,” Doc told Hannah, “around my neck.”

She examined him with interest.

“I’ll admit I have given such an idea previous thought,” she said. “But do you think this is the time and place for it?”

Doc colored uncomfortably.

“Hang on, I mean,” he said. “Cling to my back. I’ll show you how.”

“Then,” said Hannah, “this isn’t romance?”

“Get on my back,” Doc said impatiently.

THE bronze man got Hannah positioned on his back as he wished. Then, as a matter of precaution, he used the long, silken line which was attached to the collapsible climbing grapple which he always carried, and took a few turns around them, so that the girl would not fall off.

“This is crazy business,” Hannah whispered. “Say, wait a minute! Oh, great grief! You're not going to swing from tree to—”

Doc took off. He made a long run out into space on a swaying, bending bough, as if it were a springboard, and went out into space.

Hannah didn't scream. She was too scared. Then the bronze man caught a bough of the next tree, flipped up and on through dizzy nothingness.

Hannah shrieked then. And immediately the jungle was thundering with rifle noise. Bullets cut through the foliage, aimed blindly at the sound. They were probably not as close as they sounded.

Doc landed on a sloping tree trunk, ran up with hands and feet, got into the dizzy heights, stepped to another limb, which bent alarmingly, dropped from that to another, ran along it, was in space again.

Hannah shut her eyes. She did not make any more sound.

Doc traveled through the jungle lanes for a quarter of an hour, judged they were safe, and stopped.

He untied Hannah. She immediately wrapped both arms and legs around a tree bough. For a while, she was without words.

“Why can't a person faint when she wants to?” she gasped finally.

Doc examined bruises which her fingers had made as she clung to him during the aërial voyage.

“The silk cord was probably excess caution,” he said. “You wouldn't have fallen off.”

“Don't you ever,” said Hannah grimly, “do a thing like that again without first telling me about it.”

“You would have refused,” Doc said.

“You bet I would have,” she agreed heartily. “I wish I could have. I wouldn't have done that for anything. That was the worst thing that ever happened to me.”

Doc was silent.

Hannah said, “That was the first time I was ever so scared that I screamed. I'm sorry about that. But I couldn't help it.”

Doc smiled slightly. She had not been nearly as frightened as he had expected. Once he had done something similar with Ham Brooks, who was not supposed to have any nerves, and Ham had fainted.

Hannah sighed. She climbed down with infinite care until she was on the ground. She stamped the ground as if to make sure it was real and enjoy its solidness.

“What,” she asked, “do we do now?”

“Try to find the answer to this mystery,” Doc explained, “and go on from there.”

THE afternoon was well along now. In an hour or two, it would be dark.

Doc and Hannah had climbed the sharp face of the volcanic cone to a height of a few hundred feet, not so high as to be out of the jungle protection, but high enough to get a point for general observation.

Below them was a considerable flat area, not very wide, not much more than a quarter of a mile at any point, but a flat land that was long, the full length of the island on that side.

“There,” said Hannah, “is where the American government was to build its airfield runway.”

The location was good, Doc could see. A few big bulldozers could strip the jungle and level the ground in a short time, to make the runway. It was long enough for heavy bombers. And the direction was right, into the prevailing trade winds. Since, the wind always came from one direction, more than one runway would not be necessary.

(The prevalence of strong winds from one direction is characteristic of many of the Caribbean islands. On some islands, of which the island of Curacao is typical, the steady, hard winds have pulled trees out of shape, all branches growing off in one direction with the wind, instead of in all directions as in a normal tree.)

While they were studying the lay of the ground, noise of a plane came out of the distance. It was a moderately large ship, civilian.

“The seaplane,” said Hannah. “The one which picked up the parachutists and”—she glanced at Doc—“flew off toward my island, Geography Cay.”

The plane did not land immediately. It flew a leg off to the south, then to the north, then into the east.

“Reconnoitering,” Doc said.

“But why?”

They learned the reason for the reconnoitering after the seaplane came back and landed, taxied up to the beach, and the crew got out.

They watched closely, saw one prisoner taken from the plane.

“Major Lowell,” Hannah said. “At least, they still have him alive.”

Major Lowell was dragged into the largest of the stone buildings, the same house into which the other prisoners had been taken. There were armed guards at the door, and other guards patrolling here and there.

“Notice the military manner of those guards?” Doc asked.

Hannah frowned at the scene. “You know, they do act like soldiers, at that. But they are in civilian clothes.”

Doc said, “Watch that man moving from one guard to another. He seems to be a noncommissioned officer, checking up on the guard. Watch them salute him.”

Hannah observed one of the patrols click off a salute. She gasped.

“That’s not an American salute!” she exclaimed. She looked at Doc. Her face got pale. “That was . . . was an enemy salute!”

THEY were ready, then, for the submarine.

The craft got a signal first. A man walked to the beach edge with three fused sticks of dynamite. He lighted the fuses from a cigar, threw the sticks far out into the water. The dynamite exploded at intervals of three or four seconds. The impact doubtless was carried out underwater to the submarine.

The sub surfaced a few moments later. She had been waiting for the signal.

Hannah exclaimed, "The seaplane! It scouted the adjacent sea to make sure everything was clear!"

"It is an enemy submarine, all right," Doc said. He studied the submersible with interest. "Cargo," he said.

Hannah was pointing at the spot where the underseas boat had surfaced.

"Black bottom," she said. "I remember, out there where it was lying. There is a lot of seaweed over black sand. There are several spots around this island, and around all these islands. A submarine lying there could not be seen regardless of how bright the sun was or how close over the spot a reconnaissance plane flew."

Doc still had a tiny gadget which he habitually carried, a tube with an arrangement of lenses so that it could be used as telescope, periscope, breathing tube for use under water, and other purposes. He got it out and examined the submarine.

"Cargo, all right," he said.

Hannah stared. "Cargo," she said. "You mean that's not a combat submarine?"

"They probably have torpedo tubes and you can see two deck guns," Doc said. "But this ship is large, and built for underwater travel over great distances at high speed. A few of them have been sunk, and it is believed they have been more than mother ships for smaller combat submarines."

The submarine moved inshore. It came rapidly, for the water was deep and free. Close to the beach, it slackened speed. When it grounded, the bow of the submersible was not more than ten feet from the beach sand.

They began rigging the equivalent of a breeches buoy, a kind of continuous conveyor for cargo.

Hannah was impressed by the efficiency.

"They've done this before," she said.

SAILORS were scrambling off the submarine. It was evident that everyone was getting a short leave ashore to stretch his legs.

Some of the submarine crew bolted for the house, where there was evidently food and liquor. Others wandered over to the wire pen, examined the native prisoners, and shouted ribald jokes at the colored women inside.

Meantime, a squad had been formed of the men who already had been on the island. These began escorting prisoners aboard the submarine.

First prisoners taken aboard were Monk and Ham. Renny and Johnny were next. Then Major Lowell and Stony Smith. Two men ran down the beach chasing the two pets, Habeas Corpus and Chemistry. They did not catch the animals.

Now they began removing the natives from the compound and placing them aboard the submarine.

“Why are they taking those people away on the submarine?” Hannah pondered aloud.

“The reason,” Doc said, “should be fairly obvious.”

She frowned. “You mean, they're going to take them to Europe as war prisoners to get them away from the island?”

“Those natives in the compound,” Doc said, “are the descendants of pirates, you say?”

“Yes.” Hannah nodded. “They are about like the people on my island.”

“Would they,” Doc asked, “stand by and see something done that would help the Axis powers?”

Hannah shook her head instantly. “They would not. They have their own rather strange customs, and their code of conduct is not the code of many people, but they wouldn't do that. In fact, I happen to know that many of them have tried to get into the English or American navy.”

“Then,” Doc said, “if the natives here found out the Axis was using the island, they would not stand for it?”

Hannah's face was grim.

“So that's why they're prisoners,” she said. “But I don't understand why that submarine is in here. What is going on? They are not using the island as a submarine base. They could not get away with that. American patrol planes fly over the island regularly, looking for just that sort of thing.”

“You remember the parrot's nest?”

“Remember it!” she exclaimed. “The thing has me silly. It doesn't make sense.”

“We will probably find,” Doc said, “that it wasn't exactly a parrot and its nest that was so important. But that the parrot and the nest was responsible for the trouble starting.”

She shook her head. “I do not understand.”

Doc indicated the volcanic cone behind them. “The formation of this island is unusual.”

“Lots of these islands are volcanic in origin—”

“This one is different. At first, it appears to have been formed by an upheaval, then by lava which built up the top of the cone and spilled down the sides in places. That is not in itself extraordinary. But the geological formation is not usual.”

“You mean, there's a connection?”

“Apparently.”

“If you've made a guess,” she said, “I wish you'd tell me what it is.”

DOC SAVAGE seemed not to hear the request. He watched the beached submarine for a while. The bow of the craft was resting on the beach, but they could float it again by blowing some of the ballast tanks.

Prisoners were still being marched aboard. It was evident that they intended to put all the natives on the vessel. The natives were not going aboard willingly, but so far it had not been necessary to shoot anyone.

Doc turned to Hannah. "Your wrist watch running?"

She examined the timepiece, compared it with Doc's watch. "Seems to be all right. Only about two minute difference in time."

Doc set the watches to the same time.

"In exactly one hour," he said, "I want you to walk down to the beach and join them."

Hannah stared at him blankly.

Doc said, "Tell them you have decided to join them, and that you want fifty thousand dollars."

"I wouldn't join them for fifty million," Hannah said.

Doc was silent for a while. "Does that mean you will not tell them that?"

"Of course not," she said. "I'll tell them anything you say—if it will help corner them."

Doc nodded.

"Convince them," Doc said, "that your information is valuable. Tell them that it has to do with something I did."

Hannah said, "All right. What did you do?"

Doc took a small grenade out of his clothing. "This is a time bomb," he said. "Now, I am going to leave you here. I have a job to do with the bomb. That submarine is not going to reach Europe."

Hannah smiled thinly. "That is what I am to tell them?"

"Exactly," Doc said. "Tell them just that. But wait one hour before you do so. But neglect to tell them that you waited an hour."

Hannah breathed inward deeply and uneasily. "All right," she said. "But I hope it works."

"I hope so, too," Doc said.

### **Chapter XIII. SEA TRAP**

HANNAH waited the hour. It was a long time. It was an age.

She worked her way down to the beach, and stood behind a thick palm bole thirty feet from an armed sentry.

"Hello, there," she called. "Take it easy, pal. I want to talk."

The sentry jumped, lifted his rifle. "Who is?" he demanded in poor English.

Hannah made her voice pleasant, said, "A friend."

The sentry thought that over. He was intrigued by her voice. "Come out," he ordered. "Come here,

friend.”

Hannah joined him. The sentry was very favorably impressed when he saw how pretty she was.

“*Ach, fraulein!*”

he exclaimed. “*Sprechen sie Deutsch, bitte?*”

“I speak only English,” Hannah said.

The sentry looked at her. He was a burly young man with sensual lips and appreciative eyes. “You native, *nein?*” he asked.

“You better call your boss, my amorous friend,” Hannah said dryly. “He will want to talk to me.”

The sentry grinned. “Talk to me, *ja?* Much better, *ja?*”

“Look, Romeo, you're playing with fire,” Hannah said. “Call your boss, or you'll wish you had.”

“A kiss first, *bitte,*” said the sentry. He took a step forward.

A uniformed enemy naval officer appeared. The sentry hastily snapped to attention.

Hannah had not told the truth about understanding only English. She was not a fluent linguist. But she understood the officer asking the sentry what was going on. And the sentry replied that it was just a girl who was a native on the island.

The officer promptly knocked the sentry flat.

“That's fine,” Hannah said. “I thought I would have to get around to doing that myself.”

The officer didn't think it was funny. He seized her by the arm and rushed her off to the house. Around the house were some of the gang who had been in Washington.

“That's Hannah,” one of them said. “She's one of them who helped stir up this trouble.”

“The one who was with this Doc Savage?”

“That is right.”

Instantly, the officer showed Hannah the muzzle of a pistol and a fierce expression. “Where is Savage?”

“That gun doesn't scare me,” Hannah said. “Look here, I came down here because I need some money.”

They did not quite understand. “Money?”

“Fifty thousand dollars,” Hannah said.

The officer laughed loudly. “Over one hundred thousand marks,” he said. “Ridiculous.”

“Dollars, not marks,” Hannah told him. “I wouldn't give you ten cents a bushel for your marks.”

“Anyway,” said the officer, “it is ridiculous.”

“It'll be worth it.”

“What do you mean?”

“Doc Savage did something,” Hannah said, “and it will be worth fifty thousand to you to know what it was. But use your own judgment.”

THE thing did not take selling. Hannah was surprised how little selling it took. They immediately believed her, and they were a great deal more worried than she expected them to be.

They were very scared of Doc Savage.

They threatened her for a while. Then they told her, in a tone which they did not succeed in making convincing, that they didn't give a damn; that they couldn't take her on the submarine, so they'd probably have to shoot her. Then they went off and left her guarded by four fierce-looking sailors with light machine guns.

Through the window, Hannah saw that they were now landing cargo on the submarine.

The cargo surprised her.

It consisted of small, but stout wooden boxes. The boxes seemed heavy. There were not many of them. A dozen or two.

When the last box was loaded, the officer—Hannah had concluded by now that the man was the submarine commander—came in and drew a pistol.

*“Auf wiedersien, fraulein,”*

he said. “If you wish to pray, you had better do so.”

Hannah showed him her teeth. “I pray, all right,” she said. “But not for myself.”

“You might,” said the officer, “help yourself by giving all the information you have concerning the doings of Doc Savage.”

“I might,” Hannah agreed, “for fifty thousand dollars in American money.”

“Where would we get American money?”

“In gold, then,” Hannah said. “You have stolen plenty of gold, I imagine.”

The officer did some threatening. It got him nowhere.

“Take her on board the submarine,” he said in German. “We sail at once!”

That shocked Hannah. She tried to keep her feelings off her face. So they were sailing, and taking her along. She hadn't expected that.

Doc Savage had not told her the details of his plan. She had racked her brain without thinking of anything that one man could do to remedy the situation.

The only thing pleasant and sustaining in the situation was the remarkable confidence she had acquired in Doc Savage. In the beginning, she had been skeptical about the bronze man. She had heard of him. He was a legend in the far corners of the earth. And privately, she had considered him too good to be true. She had expected him to be a flop.

But she had seen him work, and had changed her opinion. She remembered the breathless business of

traveling through the trees, and shivered.

They took her aboard the submarine.

The sub blew its forward ballast tanks, lifted its bow free of the sand. It backed off the beach. It lay about a hundred yards offshore, waiting while final preparations were made for departure.

ONE of the final preparations, it became evident, was to get Hannah to talk.

The submarine commander stood in front of Hannah, scowling, for some time.

“Fifty thousand dollars, eh?” he said in English.

He went out of the compartment, squeezing through the narrow door in the emergency bulkhead. When he came back, he had a metal box which seemed heavy, and a sailor was following him carrying another box, a wooden one—one of the boxes which they had just loaded aboard.

The commander opened the metal case. There was yellow metal inside—small bars of gold, molded and stamped with its value.

The officer placed several of the little bars on the steel table.

“That,” he said impressively, “is fifty thousand dollars.”

“So we are going to make a deal,” Hannah said, sounding pleased.

“I do not know,” the commander admitted. “We might. But you must know what you are doing.”

“That,” Hannah said, “would be a help.”

The commander studied her. “I’ve been doing some inquiring about you, and I find you had pirates for ancestors, and a rather unusual background,” he said. “It is possible I will have to deal with you. First, however, I am going to tell you what you are getting into, and what you will have to do.”

He gestured at the sailor with the wooden box, said, “Open the box and show it to the lady,” in his native language.

The sailor pried the cover off the wooden box. He let Hannah view the contents.

Silver, she thought. Then she changed her idea. Not silver. This metal was different, different in texture and color and sheen.

She was no metallurgist. She knew gold when she saw it; that is, she could tell it from brass if she scratched it and found it softer. The same way with silver and lead.

She made a random guess. “Tungsten,” she said.

The submarine commander jumped. He was startled. “You knew that!” he accused her. “Doc Savage told you! So Savage solved the mystery at once.”

Truthfully, Hannah said, “Brother, I figured it out for myself.”

The officer snorted. “Impossible! It is the opinion of geologists that no tungsten exists in this part of the world. The geological formations are not right for it. It was only through some freak in the volcanic

upheaval which formed Happy Bones Island, that a small vein of almost chemically pure tungsten was brought up and exposed.”

Hannah thought: *So that was what Doc meant when he was talking about the geologically unusual structure of the island!*

Tungsten! It had been nothing but a random guess on her part. She had seen the metal in electrical apparatus, and had read a magazine article about how essential it was in war use.

The magazine article on tungsten, she remembered, had said that the Axis powers were frantically short of it. Tungsten was a thousand times more valuable to the Axis than gold, because there was so little, and they had to have it.

“So there is tungsten on Happy Bones,” she said. “Go ahead with your story, commander.”

HE surprised her by complying.

“Tungsten was found on Happy Bones recently by accident,” he explained. “The man who found it could sell it to America, to the United States—for the market price. Or he could sell it to us for a thousand times that price, paid in gold. So he chose to sell it to us.”

“The man being Stony Smith,” Hannah said.

“Do not be silly. Stony Smith is a prisoner aboard. Stony Smith's natives are prisoners aboard.”

“Then who was he?”

*“Nein, fraulein*

. His identity would be better a secret. He contacted us, and this is the third trip to the island to get tungsten. We need much more. There is enough on Happy Bones to supply us. It may well mean the winning of the war for us.”

Hannah studied him. “There was a little hitch,” she said, “when the United States decided to put a flying field on Happy Bones.”

The submarine commander grimaced. “*Ja!* Bad, that. And unexpected. We could not come to Happy Bones and get tungsten if the Americans had an air base there.”

“And so?”

“So we dispatched our man to Washington to see what could be done. He took along assistants who could pass as Americans. That was in case Major Lowell, the American officer who had charge of locating the flying field, would not listen to reason.”

Hannah straightened. “Listen to reason—you mean, you tried to bribe Major Lowell?”

*“Ja!*

Exactly. Our man took along a sample plate of the tungsten—“

“Parrot's nest!” Hannah said, making what she realized was the wildest kind of guess.

*“Ja!*

So you knew that, too? It was a rare, green parrot nesting in a cage—“

“That was silly wasn't it?”

The officer smiled proudly. “It was very clever. It was my idea, *fraulein*. The parrot was rare, its eggs rarer still, so rare that none exist in scientific institutions. Such a parrot, in the act of sitting on its eggs, was a rare, scientific exhibit. So our man took it to Washington, to the scientists there. And of course there had to be a cage. And the bottom plate of the cage was made of our tungsten. No one thought of noticing that the bottom plate was a rare metal. Very clever, eh?”

Hannah thought it over.

“Still silly,” she said.

THE submarine commander became slightly indignant. “This is not being told to entertain you,” he snarled. “Now tell me, what did Doc Savage do?”

“Fifty-thousand dollars,” Hannah said.

“You will get it. But you will have to go to Germany and remain until we win the war—”

“That'll be a heck of a long time,” said Hannah.

“What did Doc Savage do?”

Hannah gave him the information.

“Doc showed me a grenade, a time bomb,” she said. “And he told me that this submarine would never reach Europe. Then he walked off and left me.”

The commander whitened. “How large a bomb?”

“Small one.”

The man acted as if he had the bomb in his pocket. He did nothing, could do nothing, apparently, but bounce up and down for a while.

Then he dived out of the compartment bawling, “Quick! Everybody! Get into the hold! Get those boxes of tungsten, and get them ashore!”

The submarine had a deep draft, and the hold was a sizeable section a little forward of amidships. Aft, there was the engines, the motors, the battery room. Then the hold. And forward, in the bow, the torpedo room. The crew's quarters was under the conning tower.

The yelling of the commander drew everybody within earshot. They came scrambling. They poured into the hold.

“Grab those boxes!” the commander shouted. “Every man take a box ashore, and quick! There is a bomb in one of them!”

Hannah thought: *What makes him think there is a bomb in one of the boxes?* But then, it was logical. How else could a bomb get aboard?

The hold filled with excited men.

Hannah stood outside. The excited commander was beside her. Not all the sub crew was in the hold, but the majority of them were.

Doc Savage came out of the shadows. He came down from the conning tower hatch, silently and fast.

“Here!” said the surprised commander in German. “Who are you?”

Doc hit him, knocked him headlong through the bulkhead door into the hold. Then Doc slammed the hold door shut, and came down hard on the mechanical dogs which sealed it.

“Get the prisoners loose,” he told Hannah.

## **Chapter XIV. STICKS AND STONES**

THE prisoners were underneath, and forward of, the conning tower, in the quarters of officers and crew, and in a storeroom. Doc got to the first door, and got it open. Hannah was close behind him.

“How did you know they were here?” Hannah asked, meaning the prisoners.

“Have been lying against the hull in the darkness for an hour, listening,” Doc said.

Inside the tiny cubicle was Monk and Renny, the two best of Doc's group in a free-for-all. Ham and Johnny were good in a fight, but Ham did best with his innocent-looking sword cane, and Johnny was so long that there was too much room for men to get hold of him.

Their wrists were handcuffed with steel manacles; their ankles were tied with ropes. All the prisoners seemed to be treated in that fashion.

“They didn't have enough handcuffs to go around,” Monk yelled.

Doc cut the leg bindings.

“This is a good time to do the best you can,” he said. “Get going.”

They found Major Lowell in a cabin all by himself. It was the commander's cabin, so evidently having Major Lowell occupy his cabin was the commander's idea of a gesture.

“Hello. Have you got a gun?” Major Lowell asked quietly.

“Fists, and whatever else you can pick up,” Doc said. “Go to it. Part of them are locked in the hold. Don't let them out.”

Hannah was not at the bronze man's side. She was down the corridorlike passage, so narrow that two could not pass easily inside it. She had hold of the dogging handle of a door, and was failing to operate it because she was unfamiliar with that type of mechanism.

Behind the door, which was the door of a hold, voices were yelling angrily. It was the native prisoner group. Being cramped in the narrow, unfamiliar confines of the submarine compartment, without good air, with no idea of what actually was going to be done with them, had made them anything but passive.

Doc got the door open.

The natives piled out. The shouting, the shooting—there was shooting in different places in the submarine now—touched off a fighting frenzy.

“Go aft!” Doc shouted. “Into the engine rooms. Get the enemy!”

Either they didn't understand him, or they didn't give a damn, or they wanted to fight the first thing that moved. They made for him.

Hannah spoke loudly in a dialect. It was strictly mixed language she screamed at them—African Gullah, English, French, local improvisations.

They let Doc alone.

They flowed aft. They were a tide of black tigers.

“Wow!” Hannah shrieked. “You want to see this! They speak the same language as my natives. You should see them fight!”

She sounded full of glee.

She should have had a cutlass to swing.

DOC went forward into the control room. In this type of submarine, there was usually an arsenal room near there, containing pistols and rifles and light machine guns. The crew of a submarine do not normally function as hand-to-hand fighters; so they do not go about their duties burdened with pistols and rifles. Such weapons, never used, would be a nuisance. The chances were that not half a dozen men aboard the submarine had guns, and they would be officers.

But they were at the gun lockers when Doc reached the arsenal compartment. Two sailors were hauling out rifles and pistols and ammunition.

As he came into the compartment, Doc imitated the voice of the submarine commander, and spoke German.

“Quick, get those rifles and help me!” he said.

They knew their commander's voice. They were excited. The trick fooled them for a moment. Long enough for Doc to get his hands on them.

The first man, Doc disarmed with a yank. He hit the man with his fist, but not as successfully as he would have liked. The man did a kind of loose-legged dance backward.

The second man evidently had a Japanese background of jujitsu. He drew back with an ostentatious show of sending a roundhouse fist at Doc's jaw; instead of doing that, he jumped with both feet and kicked. It was very modern judo. It had disabled many a man.

Doc twisted to the side. The man's feet missed his stomach. As they went past, Doc grabbed both the legs. He plunged forward with them, twisting the man's body over.

Theoretically, when you completed the judo kick, your body naturally came to the floor, and you landed on your hands. But the twisting put the man's back toward the floor, and he hit on the back of his head.

The sailor did not move, except to kick his legs a little.

The first sailor, not greatly dazed by Doc's blow, was going up a ladder to a small, open deck hatch.

He had head and shoulders outside when Doc got his legs. The bronze man pulled. The sailor, husky, had elbows hooked over the hatch rim. Doc, hanging to the man's legs, swung up and put his own feet against the ceiling and pulled. He got no results.

Doc then disjointed one of the man's ankle joints. Unjointing the ankle took strength and knowledge, because it was not like unjointing a wrist or elbow.

Doc then let him go.

The sailor flopped around out on deck, screeching. Now he was interested in nothing but his ankle.

Doc locked the arsenal with the keys which were in the lock.

He scrambled out on deck, ran past the sailor with the ankle, and headed for the bow deck hatch, the cargo hatch. They could get that open from below. It took a little time, because it was a big hatch that was best opened by power. But they could get it open, and they were.

Doc kicked fingers loose from the edge of the hatch. He got on top of the hatch, which was thick enough to keep back bullets from below.

“Bring those hand grenades!” he shouted.

There was no one near him, and no grenades as far as he knew.

“Bring those grenades!” he roared.

A square figure piled out of the conning tower and came galloping forward. Monk. He was pleased with the fight.

He got the idea about the grenades.

“Here are some Mills bombs!” he howled.

He had none, but he made it sound as if he had, and as if it would be the joy of his life to pitch a few down into the hold. “We'll blow 'em to shreds in there!” Monk hollered.

The submarine commander, down below, did not waste any more time.

“Is such a mess really necessary?” he asked. “Why couldn't we discuss a surrender.”

He did not sound frightened, just weary and defeated.

THERE was just one more shot.

It did not come immediately.

First, they got the submarine crew together, searched them, and put them in the cargo hold, which was as good a temporary prison as any. It was necessary to rescue some of the submarine men from the natives, who were still indignant and bloodthirsty.

Renny Renwick, who was an artillery expert, unlimbered one of the five-inch deck guns and lobbed a couple of shells ashore, together with some threats in his thundering voice.

Soon prisoners came trooping down to the beach, arms in the air. These were the enemy who had been

ashore. They were surrendering.

Then the shot.

The shot was in the submarine, far aft. A single report. It was rather loud, for the aft deck hatch was open.

A man climbed out and sat on the hatch rim.

Doc went to him. It was Major Lowell.

The man had a pistol. He eyed the weapon distastefully, then shuddered and tossed it overboard.

Major Lowell said, "I have been a soldier fourteen years. This is the first time I have been so scared, and the first time I have killed a man."

"He came hunting you?" Doc asked. "I was afraid of that."

Major Lowell nodded. "He had to. I was the only one who could actually prove his guilt, I suppose. I do not think his natives knew he was selling the tungsten to the enemy. I think they were locked up in that prison compound so they would not suspect. And he had the enemy pretend that they had him a prisoner, in order to fool everyone."

Doc said nothing.

"I suppose," said Major Lowell, "that he had visions of enjoying the wealth he got from selling the tungsten, after the war, in America."

Monk Mayfair had approached. Monk said, "So Stony Smith was the head culprit."

"Stony Smith," Major Lowell said, "came to me in Washington and tried to bribe me not to locate a flying field here. He had a parrot and a cage, and the bottom of the cage was a plate of tungsten. That was his sample, to prove he was not kidding, and that he could pay me a great deal."

Monk had gotten a flashlight somewhere. He poked the beam down the hatch.

"Nice shot," Monk said approvingly. "Right between the eyes."

Major Lowell looked at Doc.

"I am afraid I have offended you," he said. "I understand it is your policy never to take a human life."

"Accidents will happen," Monk said. "Yeah, accidents will happen to guys like Stony Smith."

HANNAH found the handcuff keys. She began taking the manacles off the wrists of Monk and Ham and the others. They had fought handcuffed.

"You should fight handcuffed all the time," Hannah said approvingly. "It gives you quite a style. Just like frogs."

Monk was pleased. "You're not exactly a lamb yourself," he said.

"You should have seen my Grandmother Abigail Hannah," Hannah told him. "Now, there was a pirate for you! She was the greatest of the Hannah women."

Hannah had something on her mind. "This thing is all done, except for the navy picking up the prisoners and submarine," she said. "Why don't you fellows come over to my island, Geography Cay, for a visit and a rest."

Monk looked at her again. But she was not watching him; her eyes were on Doc Savage.

It looked like somebody had better rescue Doc from this daughter of the pirates.

*And I'm the guy,*

Monk thought, *who would like to do that rescuing.*

THE END